THE QUEEN OF LOVE

S. BARING GOULD

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A NOVEL

BY

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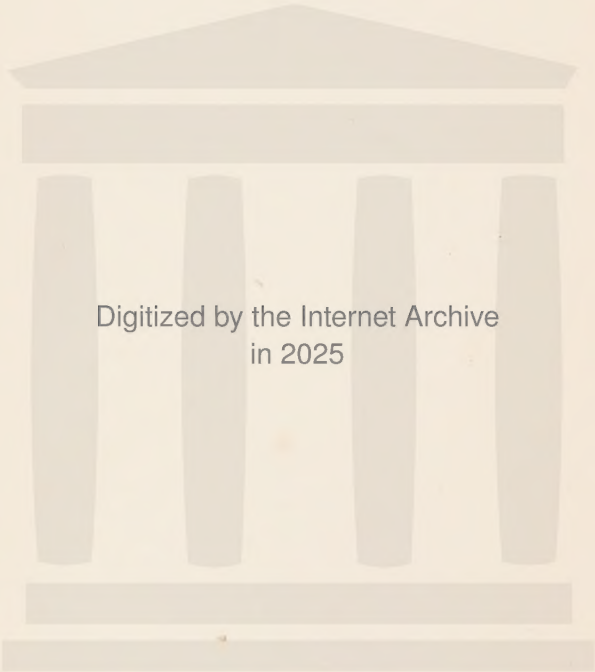
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CHAPTER I.

NOTICE TO QUIT

"You did what was wrong, Queenie." Andrew said the words on the Monday afternoon, when he had returned to Alma Terrace after his work at the factory. "I have been thinking of you all day, and have hardly been able to attend to the brine-pans."

"I am glad you thought of me," answered the girl.

They were in the front parlour. The grate had been replaced during the morning; a smell of wet mortar pervaded the room. No fire was kindled, as the mason had advised that the mortar should be allowed to set slowly.

"You did what was wrong, Queenie."

The girl seated herself at the table. Her mouth was screwed into a pout. She put her elbows on the

board and began to pick to pieces a bit of flower that was between her fingers.

"Andrew, I have had the catalogue of my offences read over my head by uncle and aunt—mainly by him. I am all that is bad. First of all, and that is the worst of all, for it was repeated five times, I am a Sabbath-breaker." Queenie took one of the bits of flower stalk and placed it before her on the table. "Then I am a hypocrite because I shammed lameness. This little bit of stick stands for hypocrisy. Next, Andrew, I am heartless, because I put off my black dress and went into my fandangles for a quarter of an hour. You, little bit of stick, stand for heartlessness—ugh! that is a nasty crime. Fourthly, I am ungrateful, because I went against the feelings of Uncle Jabez"—again she marked her delinquency with a particle of flower-stalk. "Fifthly, I am disobedient, because I did not read the goody-goody books I was ordered to read. That twig stands for disobedience; do you see, Andrew? Then comes dishonesty; I took the rope with which I had no right to meddle. And in addition I am brazen-faced for talking with Rab. Let me consider how many crimes that is. I must count the bits—one—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight. Eight wickednesses! Oh, horrors! Andrew, that is not all. Aunt Beulah reported my ninth. I am unreliable because I did not attend to the kitchen fire, let it go out, and

so the potatoes were not boiled for supper. Ah, me! then came a shower—untruthful, profane, rebellious, wilful, pert, disreputable! Oh, Andrew! do look at this little pile of sticks! Is it not a heap? Well, that represents me — a little bundle and mass of vices."

She poked the accumulation of particles in the direction of the youth, put her head down on the table, and looked slyly at him out of the corners of her eyes.

"Seriously, you have done what was very wrong!"

"I know it," said Queenie. "Don't you scold me, Andrew. I've had uncle and aunt jumping on me. I'm down. Don't you drive your heels into poor little Queenie as well."

"I do not want to scold you," said the young man.

"Then why did you say I was in the wrong?"

"I say what you admit, but you do not look at the matter seriously enough."

"Frivolous! frivolous! You have hit it. I knew there was another naughtiness I had not remembered, and now I have done with the stalk. Get me another bit of stick to set in the middle of my pile to represent frivolity."

"Do be serious, Queenie. This is either put on, or it shows a really ill-balanced mind."

"I know, Andrew, I did what was wrong," said

Queenie with gravity. "But when uncle goes on at me, I feel that I don't care; I'll do worse!"

"Let us talk over what happened last night, and what the consequences will be. I will not scold."

"That pleases me. I should like to talk with you; I have no one else of whom I can make a companion and speak to concerning what is in my heart."

"Well, and the beginning of all is—you ought not to have done this."

Andrew drew a chair to the table.

"I know I ought not, but I did not suppose that anyone would have found me out."

"Whether you ran the chance of being found out or not, you should not have done it. It was not honourable, Queenie, to act behind my father's back, in his house, in such a manner as you knew he would disapprove of."

"Now I have you!" exclaimed the girl, raising her head and clapping her hands. "Why, then, did you play cards?"

"Then I did wrong. I have felt so ever since."

"I was Eve, and I enticed you."

"If your foot were well, you ought not to have pretended that you were lame. Then had you come with us to chapel, nothing of this kind of thing would have occurred."

"I don't like chapel."

"It is not a matter of like or dislike, but of duty.

Queenie, you act on caprice and not as conscience dictates.

"Why should I go when I hate it?"

"Queenie, you might have been killed when your poor father was!"

"So I might if Rab had not saved me."

"Did you thank him?"

"Of course I did."

"Well—was it Rab, and Rab only, who delivered you from death? Rab and Rab only whom it was your duty to thank?"

The girl was silent, considering. She played with a lock of her golden hair, turning it about her fingers. A little hastily now and with manifest nervousness.

"And if you have enjoyed health and strength," proceeded Andrew, "and have had a home and shelter, and clothing, and all your faculties—is it such a hard matter, and a thing to hate, to return thanks for it all, once a week?"

"Give me your hand, Andrew," said the girl impetuously. "You are right, I'll go to chapel with you next Sunday."

"I fear you will not have the chance of going with me."

"Why not?"

"Father is terribly discomposed at what has taken place—first the beggar-my-neighbour, then the tight-rope dancing. I never saw him in such a state of mind

before. He says that this condition of affairs cannot continue, and that he cannot live in the same house with you."

"Is he going to bundle me into the street?"

"Not that—but he has been to the Buttons to see if he can place you there—at all events for a while."

Queenie was silent; she bit the ends of her hair. Presently she drew a long breath—it was hardly a sigh, for there was a touch of relief in the manner in which she breathed.

"I am a pickle," she said, "a pickle, even though I have never been steeped in your brine. I really cannot help fidgeting."

"It will be too terrible to lose you," said Andrew.

"It will be worse for me to be parted from you," answered Queenie, and suddenly she burst into tears. "I can talk to you, and hear you talk; and you do not ruffle up all my feathers as does uncle. When he begins to lecture me, I bristle all over. I cannot help it. Our clown used to get tipsy, and then, instead of being brimful of fun and nonsense, he became dolorous and tearful. With some folks all things go contrary. So is it with me. I ought to become humble and docile when your father has pounded at me. But I don't—I become just the contrary, exactly as our clown, when charged with ale and spirits, became what was least expected of him. When your father is talking to me, I am all over the shop with my thoughts. I can't

keep my eyes still, nor my feet, nor my fingers, and the more he scolds me the worse I feel. If I stay here much longer, he will make a little devil of me."

Andrew was, and looked, distressed.

"All that is good in me," said he, "I owe to my father."

"We are made differently," said Queenie. "There was a fellow at a show once that I saw. He had three glasses before him, and what he poured out of the same bottle turned red as blood in one glass, green as grass in another, and in the third yellow as the sun. It is so with you and me. What changes to gold in you, makes verdigris in me."

Andrew sighed and looked sad.

"If that be so," he said, "then there is no help for it. It may be best that this little company should be dissolved, and that you should go to the Buttons. This I know, Queenie, home will no longer be the same to me after you are gone. I shall have nothing to look forward to when work is over."

"Do you look forward to seeing me, Andrew?"

He fixed his great blue eyes on her, and his mouth quivered.

Queenie put her hand forth and took his, drew it across the surface of the table, and patted it.

"And I am happy when you are in the house. We are friends, are we not, Andrew?"

"Yes, and ever will be so."

Ever, Andrew"—she pressed his hand.

Then he clasped hers tightly, and she could see that his eyes were filling. He turned his head away, and looked towards the window to hide his emotion, and said,—

"I cannot bear to think that you should go"—he paused. Then with a gulp he continued—"When I am on my way home after work, I ask myself—shall I see a little rosy face with gold hair at the window, looking for my return? And, sure enough, it is usually there. Then, before I have reached the garden gate, I see the door fly open, and out you come to meet me. I shall have but a blank window to look to, and no welcome at the gate after you are gone."

"You will come and see me if I am sent to the Buttons?"

"Yes, Queenie. But that will not be the same thing. I cannot go there every day. And how would Ada Button like it — to have me there continually asking to see you, and detaining you from your work? And if she were obliging and suffered it—well I should be in a strange house, and she would be in the room, or Mr Button, or a servant, and we could not talk in the same easy way that we do now."

"Oh! we are cousins."

"We are not really cousins. My father is not really your uncle."

"That will be awkward. Say you are my young man."

Andrew could not help laughing.

"That would be a funny way out of it," he observed.

"Yes—and, Andrew, you shall be my very own Andrew some day, and I, your little wife—that is—" she swept the heap of stalk fragments together and thrust them into his hand—"if you will be responsible for such a bundle of iniquities as I am. But really, with you I will be good. I won't go tight-roping any more, and cards—Andrew—if we play for love, there can be no poison in them. If you say there is—I'll give them up."

She spoke in such a droll fashion, with her face puckered up to laughter, that her words might be taken as a jest.

Andrew sighed.

"I wish it could be so," he said.

"Why not?"

"I have never even thought of such a thing."

"Why not? You earn enough—you told me what your wage was. And we will keep house together. Oh, famous!" she was up out of her chair and jumped over it—once, twice, thrice, and then reseated herself.

"I don't know what father would say," observed Andrew.

"Look here!" said Queenie. "I wouldn't care one snap of the fingers"—she suited the action to the

word—"for what was said by that old iron man you have as a father.

> If you love me as I love you,
> No knife shall cut our love in two."

"Humph!"

The young people looked round. There was "Hammer" Grice, filling the doorway. If the knife would not cut the young nascent love in two, fresh as the flowers of spring, "Hammer" would pound and break it to pieces. This he said with his eyes; he said it by the set muscles of his jaw.

When he spoke he made no reference to Queenie's last words, but said,—

"I know but too well that you do not care one snap of the fingers for my wishes, my words. Therefore I give you notice—this day week you leave, and take up your abode with Miss Ada Button. It is settled."

CHAPTER II.

"A BAG OF SALT"

THE manufacture of salt in Cheshire dates from the days of the Romans. It was carried on in rude fashion during the Middle Ages—nobles and country gentlemen had their "wyches" in which they steamed the brine to supply their own tables with salt.

Old Camden says that: "Near the brink of the river Dane there is a most beautiful and deep brine pit, with stairs made about it by which they that draw water out of it in leather buckets ascend half naked unto the troughs, and pour it thereinto, by which it is carried into the wych-houses, about which stand on every side stakes and poles of wood." The brine was then steamed over fires of log and of brush-wood.

There are no strong brine springs in the district, as the salt rock lies below the sea level, consequently it can not waste naturally.

In 1670 the salt rock was discovered where not drowned under a subterranean sea of brine. Thenceforth mining was begun, and the rock was excavated till the water broke in, flooded the mines and converted them into reservoirs of brine. But the quarrying of salt rock was a different branch of industry altogether from the salt making. In the town of Northwich, the principal centre of the industry, the town-pit was an artificially-constructed well, some 120 feet deep, sunk into the underground sea—or, as it is locally termed, brine-run. From this pit in former times the drawers toiled up the steps carrying leather buckets on their backs, and decanted the brine into a tank, whence it was conveyed by wooden gutters laid in the middle of the street, and supplied the several wych-houses. In these houses were little leaden pans, measuring three feet six inches by two feet six inches, and under these fires were kindled. But no "waller" or "boiler" was suffered to light his fire till the town bell on the top of the Court-House sounded the signal for firing.

As long as matters were carried on in this primitive fashion, no great harm was done. It was quite other when, in the first quarter of this century, steam pumps were introduced, and the little leaden boilers were exchanged for large pans, measuring some thirty-four feet by twenty-four feet, and when the demands made on the salt beds were increased a thousandfold.

It was now no longer a matter of supplying salt to the gentry and the people of Cheshire; the salt was required for all England, Scotland, Ireland, the United States, Canada, and the East Indies. The pumps worked hard, the fires burned night and day, the steam of the brine rose in volumes, and formed a perpetual mist over the country.

Then a remarkable phenomenon ensued. As the brine was withdrawn, down went the face of the land in grand collapse, carrying with it fields and orchards, houses and churches. And this process begun with this century is continuing and will continue till the entire salt bed has been dissolved and drawn away in brine, and has been steamed and is exported, and then, where was a fertile land, and where were towns and villages, there will be an inland lake of unsounded depth.

When a salt factory is started, then the first thing done is to sink a shaft through the red marl and gypsum till a somewhat harder substance is reached, called "flag" or "beany metal." The moment this is pierced, up the shaft boils the brine of the underground reservoir. Then a pump is let down the shaft, and slung at the surface. It rests on no foundation below; it is simply let down, like the proboscis of a fly, into the sea of brine. This is now pumped up into large tanks, open to the sky, lined with brick. From this tank pipes communicate with the several iron pans, in

which the brine has to be boiled till all the water it contains is driven off in steam, and it has yielded up all the salt it held in solution. How strong the brine is may be realised when we are told that in sea-water there is but three and a half per cent of salt, whereas in the brine pumped up, over one quarter, or twenty-six per cent. is salt. Fires are maintained under the pans, at one end, night and day. As the brine boils and parts with some of its water in steam, a corresponding amount of salt crystallizes on the surface, and as it crystallizes is raked to the side and put into moulds. If the salt scum be not at once raked off the surface, it sinks to the bottom. The salt that forms round the sides of the pans is termed "cats." Once a week the fires are let out and the pans are scraped. It is found that a crust or "scale" had formed on the slightly elevated rib, two inches in height, rises at the bottom, of gypsum, white as snow, but so hard that it has to be removed with hammer and chisel. The men who attend to these pans are termed "wallers," *i.e.*, boilers—and each waller is expected to keep his pan in clean condition, free from scale, and receives no extra wages for so doing.

On each side of the pans are the "stand insides," *i.e.*, troughs about eighteen inches below the platform—or, as it is locally termed, "hurdle"—that intervenes between them and the walls of the building. A extremity of the hurdle, dividing it from the "stand

inside." This occasions accidents; when the steam is very dense, a man sees imperfectly, and, tripping on the rib, falls forward and goes into the pan.

But though the waller is subject to chance of accident, his trade is remarkably healthy. He laughs at cholera, smallpox and scarlet fever.

When the salt has been placed in moulds, it is left for a short while to drain, and then the blocks are removed to the stove, or hot chamber, there to become thoroughly dry.

The unmoulded salt, locally termed "butter salt," is sent to the East Indies. The "cats," or salt that has become encrusted round the edges of the pan, is despatched to the pottery works for glazing pipes and pitchers.

Andrew was engaged at his pan.

The air that day was chill and heavy, charged with vapour, and it refused to take up into it the dense steam emitted by the boiling brine. The white cloud filled the walling (boiling) house, rolled about in it, and now and then only, through an open door or vent-hole, did a cool draught enter, and set the steam in revolution. It was as though an invisible arm were stirring flocks of wool.

The fires are maintained at one end only of the pans, and, as the brine boils, it sends ripples down the length of the vessel, and these ripples become covered with a formation of salt as they reach the further end.

A little glue or soft soap is put into the brine—this is called "poisoning" it—to collect the impurities which exist along with the salt, and this is skimmed off with wooden ladles.

Andrew's work was, to a large extent, mechanical—the raking of the fine crystals in a snowy foam to the side, and then casting the mass into "tubs" or moulds, which, when full, are set to drain on the "hurdles" or platform behind.

It was quite compatible with doing his work properly that his mind should be engaged elsewhere—with little Queenie.

Her childish solution of her difficulty—that he should marry her and set up house for himself—would not out of his brain. It turned and rolled and clung therein, as the coils of steam turned and rolled and clung in the walling shed.

The idea of marriage frightened Andrew. He had not considered such an eventuality. Queenie was thoughtless, and in mind not a woman. She had neither weighed what her proposal meant, nor did she, probably, understand what it involved. To her it suggested itself as the pleasantest way out of a very unpleasant condition of affairs. She had no home. She was tossed from the Rainbows' cottage into the house of the Grices, and now thrown from that into the farm of the Buttons. Hitherto she had led a wandering life, but had carried her house about with her.

Queenie liked Andrew, and Andrew had admitted to her that he was very fond of her. What more natural, therefore, to her simple mind than that they should take each other for better, for worse, and so she would be provided with a settled home.

Andrew had never met any girl previously who had in the least touched his heart. Those whom he had encountered at anniversary teas, school treats and missionary bazaars, had been but re-editions of himself on a smaller scale, and in petticoats. But this little creature, this madcap, this witch, with her frolicsomeness, her vivacity, her eccentricity, her coquettish ways, was so opposed to himself in character, in habits of thought, in bringing up, that she had laid hold of his imagination with both hands, and had coiled herself about his heart before he knew where he was. He had no doubt whatever as to the condition of his affections, but Andrew was not the man to rush headlong where his passions urged. He had common-sense and principle, and it was precisely because he doubted whether these two qualities were lodged in Queenie's soul that he held back, and entertained grave doubts whether she could be formed into a suitable wife for himself.

She was volatile, obedient to impulse alone, inconsiderate, simple to childishness in some ways, precocious in others.

Of the sort of life she had led in her former career

he knew nothing; what the moral atmosphere of the circus was he did not know. And to take a girl to his side, to be his companion for life, without any guarantee that she would be faithful and high principled, that she had balance to carry her steadily through all life's waves and storms—to do this, he was not prepared.

He could not, he would not, believe that there was evil in Queenie. He had seen enough of her to be satisfied that she was guileless and fresh. But guilelessness in a woman is not sufficient to satisfy a man. He desires not an empty watch-case, but a watch-case with a main-spring inside. Was there any law, any conscience of duty in the heart of this child, to fill and to hold it? An empty heart may become, by its mere voidness, a harbour of dragons.

Every day that Andrew spent with Queenie, she the more surprised him. He was ever making fresh discoveries in her, and these discoveries only served to further perplex him.

She was in contravention to all those ideas he had been taught to cherish as essential. He was not prepared to go the length of his father, and to condemn her for being in opposition. He thought his father's judgment was overstrained, but not that it was radically vicious.

What Andrew had been taught from infancy to respect, received no regard from Queenie; what he

had been cautioned to avoid, she ran into with eyes open and without scruple.

What possible security could he have that a girl who broke the Sabbath would not violate other commandments with as light a heart and blunt a conscience? One who was so indifferent to her duty of homage to her Maker, might, as caprice took her, neglect her duty to her husband. She was moved to do what she did by inclination, not by a sense of responsibility, and to shirk a duty the moment it became irksome.

Whilst these thoughts were rolling in his brain, Andrew — happening to look up at a somewhat unusual sound—a laugh—saw the delicate face and golden hair of Queenie shining upon him through the volumes of steam.

"Andrew, I have come to see the works."

"Queenie! How did you get in? What will father say?"

"I walked in. I asked nobody's leave. I had found out the way for myself. I have been some while with the women in their packing shed, and have seen them sewing and tying up the bags of salt, and I have helped—and here is one of the bags I have done myself."

"You should not have come without permission."

"What a cloud of steam you have here, Andrew; it

is a thousand times worse than Aunt Beulah's back kitchen on washing-day."

"You have done wrong in coming."

Andrew was annoyed, and he spoke in a tone of vexation.

"Now, don't scold me," said Queenie, hopping to his side. "Don't, dear Andrew. You yourself invited me when first we had a little chat together."

"Yes, but then I intended to ask leave for you to see over the Salt Works. Now, if my father were to find you here, I would get into trouble, and he would be most seriously offended with you."

"How was I to know? There was no dog at the door to say 'Bow wow! no admittance, miss! bow wow!'"

"Common-sense might have told you—"

"That," said Queenie, "is just what I have not got. Look here, Andrew! Fancy yourself suddenly put into a circus among horses and acrobats and ostriches and pearls of the Indies. Would you know what to do, and what to leave undone? Would your common-sense, without experience, help you? Would not you be making all kinds of mistakes? Well, it is just so with me. I am brought into a place of which I don't know the ways and the rules, and what I may touch and what not, where I may go and where I may not, what I must do and what is under ban."

"That is true enough, my poor, dear little Queenie.

But then—that which is to me a daily anxiety and distress, is that I cannot say whether you have any notion whatever of what is right in principle and what is wrong, not in this place or in that, under one condition or another, but in all places and always. That is why I think of your future with such sinking of heart. Out of mere ignorance and thoughtlessness you may commit some terrible fault, step off the right line of action and plunge, heaven knows, into what!"

"Oh, Andrew, you do not understand—I know what is right, I know what is wrong—at least, I know something about it. But you have such a lot of rights and wrongs in Alma Terrace that I get sheer bewildered—you make a sort of fog about my eyes, like this thick steam, in which one can hardly see anything clear."

"I hope it is so, as far as you are concerned," said the young man.

"Andrew, what is that trough you are in?"

"It is called the *stand inside*," he answered, and thought—that is Queenie all over, jumping from one thing to another and avoiding all serious thought.

"And is all that great boiling sea brine?"

"Yes—brine being converted into salt."

"Andrew—look!"

Suddenly, before he suspected her design, Queenie had sprung on the little ledge round the pan, balancing herself with one hand over the steaming

surface, the other she held above the trough that surrounded it, that in which stand the "wallers."

Andrew looked at her, paralysed with horror. One false step, the slightest deviation from the perpendicular, and the little creature would be over in the boiling brine. The pan was but eighteen inches deep, but to anyone once fallen in there is no recovery.

His first impulse was to shout to the girl to descend from her perilous position. Then he checked himself. A shout might give precisely that shock to her which would unnerve her, and make her lose her equilibrium.

A dense volume of steam, thick as cotton wool, rolled between him and her. For a moment he could see nothing. Had it blinded, confused her? He had known such a thing happen—a sudden hot gush of steam take away the breath, disturb the understanding, and a man had reeled and fallen in.

Andrew's second impulse was to follow Queenie, to catch her up, lay hold of her by the arm, by the waist, by the hair—it mattered not by what—and to drag her from where she stood.

He stepped along the trough; he passed through the coil of vapour, and again he saw her. She was walking along the ledge, a ledge no wider than an inch, and rounded, with arms extended; she intended

going the entire length of the pan, thirty-six feet. Thirty-six feet; and at each step she advanced eight inches. She was creeping along, one foot before the other, towards the end of the vessel, under which was a furnace, where the brine heaved and foamed, threw up bubbles and spouts of steam.

The waves ran past her, ran past Andrew, the scum of salt formed over the surface like cataract over an eye, and Andrew let it remain undisturbed and sink. He made no attempt to remove it. He could hear the hiss and ebullition of the brine. He could hear the stoker below heaping on more "slack."

He strode along the trough after her. She turned her head to look behind. She tottered. A cry of terror and pain broke from Andrew. He felt at that moment a scalding sensation over his whole body, as though he himself were immersed in the boiling fluid.

She righted herself and went on. Andrew followed circumspectly—he kept well behind. He hardly breathed, he feared to alarm her.

Again a roll of steam swept between him and the girl, and he halted, panting, trembling, his sweat as tears rolling over his face.

Then a cool waft from an opening drove the vapours apart, and again he saw Queenie. She had reached the end of the pan, and instead of stepping

down from her ledge, had turned the corner, and was balancing herself as she worked her way along the breadth of the pan—twenty-two feet.

There was another workman in the wych-house. He raked the salt crystals on the further side of the boiler. He had not seen what Queenie was about. Now, if she were not content with walking the width of the pan, and chose to descend its length, reversing the direction in which she had started, she would come upon him. What might he do?

Was it not possible, was it not probable, that directly he perceived the peril in which the child was, he would run to her to remove her from the ledge? And she—might she not shrink from him and fall? Better leave her entirely to herself; let no movement on their part distract her.

Andrew retraced his steps hastily, and went round, at the further end, to the fellow "waller" and grasped his wrist.

"Whatever you see, do not stir."

He stood, holding the man, unable to trust him otherwise, and waited till Queenie appeared—if she ever should appear—emerging from the white vapour. Andrew's heart beat like a sledge-hammer welding the plates of a waller's pan.

The time seemed to him an eternity. He could hear nothing, save the ripple and lap of the wavelets flowing and depositing their salt. Round the pan

formed a snow-like crust—"cats"—each wavelet adding to the foamy formation.

Then he and the man with him saw the girl coming on towards them, upright as a wand, flexible as an ozier. She saw Andrew, and smiled. She hastened her steps and leaped into the trough, then up to the platform or "hurdle," and laughed joyously.

"Andrew! there was no danger! There really was none at all. See; I had in my hand a seven-pound bag of salt, which the women let me take away. I held that on the side opposed to the pan, and so I was safe—quite safe. Andrew! why are you so dreadfully doubtful of me? Don't you think my father gave me more than a seven-pound bag of salt to keep me steady? I can walk where I see my way. I can walk steadily even through all the clouds and mists your father and you throw up to blind me. Why are you so convinced that I walk without anything to keep me steady?"

CHAPTER III

A SALT SCHEME

"ANDREW! fettle up. Put on your new black cloth coat and your top-hat, and look sharp about it."

Obedient as was Isaac to Abraham, and without asking his father why he was to be thus dressed, Andrew hastened to array himself.

When he was dressed and had descended, his father was not quite ready. He found Queenie below. Her golden hair was wonderful. The salt had crystallised in it, and she wore a halo about her head of mingled silver and gold. Andrew took forth his kerchief and dusted the salt out of her hair.

"Andrew," said she, "do you know that Mr Poles often comes here? Did he do so in old times?"

"Sometimes—not frequently."

"He comes in very often now, on all sorts of excuses. Do you think he is after Aunt Beulah?"

"He is a widower. There is no saying. Does she receive him graciously?"

"I do not know. He is very civil to her. But so he is to me—more so to me when she is out of the room. He is very funny."

Further conversation was cut short by the entrance of Jabez Grice.

Father and son now walked in the direction of the Buttons farm. In due time they reached Buttons, and there they turned in at the gate.

"Very handsome gates these," said Jabez.

"Yes—if only the gate would fit the posts."

"That's the fault of the settlement."

"If I had the gates, I'd have something done to put them to rights."

"Very fine drive this," said Jabez. "There, laburnum, golden chains. There, syringa, that tastes like cucumber. There, yew, laurel and rhododendron. What do you think of the drive, Andrew?"

"Very fine, but the shrubs want cutting back."

"And the house," continued Jabez, standing in front of it. "That is my idea of what a house ought to be, square as a die—one window on one side of the door, one window on the other, and three windows upstairs, one over the door, one over each of the windows below. All the chimneys gathered into one flue—there's saving of bricks. No gables nowhere—there's saving of slates. No crinkum-crankums nowhere—there's saving of lead gutters. That is just what a house ought to be."

"It is rather ugly, is it not?"

"Ugly! you don't build a house to look at, but to live in," retorted Jabez. "Very nice people the Buttons are, to whom all this belongs. Old Tom—he has his wits about him. Ada is good-looking, sensible and will be his heir—Andrew, if you can make yourself agreeable in that quarter, you may look to some day being able to set the front gate to rights, trim the bushes and alter the house."

"Have you come to see Mr Button?"

"I have; and I want you to entertain Miss Ada whilst I am engaged with her father. That is why I've had you put on your best suit and box hat."

"How long shall you be, father?"

"Half-an-hour—nothing under."

"Half-an-hour! Am I to talk to the girl all that while?"

"Yes, you are; and make yourself as agreeable as you can."

"It is rather a long time, father. I want to get home."

"I know what you are after—you are hankering to be home with that girl Queenie. Andrew, it is high time this were put a stop to. She is not suited to you. Ada Button is different. She has never kicked her feet about on horseback, and worn skirts that hardly reached below the knee. She's no painted

Jezebel. She knows nothing of skipping-ropes and butterflies and the pomps."

They were now at the front door.

Mr Button was within. So was Ada.

"She'll show you her cows and her dairy," said Jabez to his son. "I'll go into the office with old Tom."

Mr Button looked as unlike a substantial yeoman as a man well could. He was cadaverous in com plexion, and had small, cunning eyes. There was a slight stoop in his back, a little grey showing in his short-cropped hair. He wore mutton-chop whiskers. He might have been taken for a lawyer, a banker's clerk—not for a farmer.

Jabez Grice was a man who never beat about the bush. If he had something to say, he said it without preparing the ground for its reception. No sooner was he alone with Tom Button than he said,—

"I've come about that proposal of yours."

"What proposal?"

"The sale of your land."

"What—have you the money for the purchase?"

"I have money—perhaps not enough. But I can do better than buy it. If you and I can pull together, we shall make our fortunes."

"Glad to hear that. I've found myself for the last twenty years getting further and further away from that consummation."

"I don't propose exactly to buy the land."

"But, bless me! where did you find money?"

"I have been left trustee for my niece, and there is a good deal more money than I expected, locked up in unprofitable securities. We can do better with it than South American bonds."

"What! Santi's money! And the saint wants to spend it?"

Button's eye twinkled.

"Nothing of the kind," answered Grice. "You don't know me, or you would not say that."

"What will you do with it?"

"I will tell you what my idea is. If we two can work together, we will bore for brine, and run up a salt work here. Salt is under our feet."

"What will Brundrith say to that?"

"He will probably try to buy us out. One thing of two will happen, and either way we shall make a fortune. When we have begun to pump, and have got into working order, then you shall enter into negotiations with Brundrith. If he will pay us what we have laid out, and something more, and take us both into partnership, then that is well. Our fortunes are made. If he refuses—but that he will not—we will undersell him. We will draw his custom to us. I have not been in Brundrith's Works so long without having my fingers on the keys and being able to play my own tune. I know all his customers, and I can make it so unpleasant for Brundrith that he

will be driven to come to terms—and to our own terms—money down, and partnership for the future."

"You will use your ward's money to this end?"

"There is absolutely no risk. We know that there is salt under your land. We know it by the settlements and subsidence. Your cow has pioneered the way. Then, to bore and tap the brine-run will not cost much. A few hundred pounds will do it and start the pump working. The main cost is the buildings. But salt-work factories are not so expensive as others. There is no machinery to speak of. There are the pans—there is the tank; there is, worst of all, the chimney. You are on the Weaver Canal, and a couple of hundred yards of rail will put you on the line."

"Have you enough capital for all this?"

"No, I have not. But I propose to let Nottershaw into our scheme. As a builder, he can build cheaper than anyone else. He has made a good deal of money, and he will risk it when, at the end, the profits are so secure."

"What! have him in partnership also?"

"Not that. He will be paid off."

Button screwed up his little eyes, and began to drum on the table with his thin, white, bony fingers. Presently a smile played about his lips, and he said,—

"I like it. So—you will build on my land, sink a pump and suck up gold. I like it."

"You like it, doubtless," said Jabez, quickly, "from

the point of view from which you are looking. But I must have your land secured to me as a guarantee for the girl's money. I'm not quite the fool to sink her capital on land that is not hers or mine."

"Then I don't like it," said Button.

"There must be some security given to satisfy each. Here is money lying idle. Without injury to my niece I can turn it over and over, so as to enrich both myself and you. At the end she shall have the same sum back that her father left — it shall be secured to her on the land and building."

"If you buy my land and pay me a sum down, I shall be content, without any partnership, and without any bother."

"I cannot do that. We want the land and the money. The land without the capital, and the capital without the land, are paralysed."

"Then I don't understand. If you buy the land off me and do not pay, but spend the money on the salt factory—I shall be no better off—I shall be done out of everything."

"No—the money of my niece shall be secured on the land and buildings—to be hers when she shall require it; in the meantime it is at our disposal. It is quite true that there must be some mutual guarantee. Let this be it. Marry my boy to your girl. Let Andrew and Adie make a match of it. Then our interests are one."

Mr Button considered a while.

"Humph!" said he, pulling at one of his whiskers, "I can't answer for Ada. You may say to your son 'Do this,' and he does it. 'Marry such an one,' and he goes head foremost to put in the banns. But it is not the same with me and Ada. She has to be consulted, and I have to do what she wishes, not she act as I desire. I suppose there is no hurry?"

"There is decided hurry. I must make use of my ward's money whilst I may. Why, if she were to marry—and there's no controlling her, she would be out of my hands, and the money also. I could secure the money at once if I chose. Andrew would take her if I gave the word, but she is not one I could endure as a daughter-in-law, and she would be the ruin of my son in this world and the next. Then, again, what is the money without the land? We must have a suitable site on which to sink the money. Ada is the wife for my boy—wise, orderly, all that I could wish—and as I suppose I shall have to live with the young couple, or rather the young couple with me, I naturally look out for a daughter-in-law who will suit me down to the ground."

"Naturally—and you think Ada will do that?"

"I do."

"Oh, do you? How interesting."

Button looked between his half-closed eyelids at Jabez, and chuckled.

"You take your course—are firm," said Grice. "A child must accommodate itself. The young mind is a blank page. You write on it what you will."

"And you will be firm with Ada?"

"Certainly."

"Indeed—how interesting. I would give my ears to see you. Have you a back? Never broken, eh?"

CHAPTER IV.

"I LOVE MY LOVE WITH AN A."

If coming events cast their shadows before them, so, naturally, do coming persons. What made Queenie speak to Andrew about the visits of Mr Poles, the paperhanger? Naturally, it was his shadow cast before, thrown athwart her brain or spirits.

The little Queen sat in the parlour. Aunt Beulah was out. She had gone to a Dorcas meeting. Uncle Jabez and Andrew had just departed, as we have seen, on a visit to the Button's.

The time was late in the afternoon. Queenie had the house to herself. What should she do to pass the time till Andrew's return? How should she occupy her hands? Were there any legitimate games at which she might play? She remembered what Andrew had said—that it was dishonourable, behind the back of her uncle, to do in his house what she would not do to his face. Her conscience consented

to this proposition. What Andrew had said was right, and she would do nothing that might offend the Grices. Skipping-ropes were classified by her uncle with butterflies and the pomps of a wicked world. A girl can skip when alone, and entertain herself with a rope—there are not many games that can amuse for long a solitary child. Battledore and shuttlecock were impossible—she had no shuttlecock. She could have extemporised a battledore with one of Grice's half-bound missionary magazines, and a cork might have served as shuttlecock, but the rooms were low.

At the door appeared Mr Poles.

"Alone, my dear?"

"Yes, Mr Poles; uncle and aunt are out, so is Andrew. You will have to call again."

"I am warm with my walk up the hill. May I sit down and breathe?"

"Oh, certainly, any message for Aunt Beulah? She will be sorry to have missed you."

"Oh none, thank you." Mr Poles seated himself; placed his hat between his feet, closed his knees, and hung his hands over them. "I've brought my photograph. I thought you might like to see it."

"Thank you, Mr Poles; Aunt Beulah will be charmed. I will give it to her."

The paperhanger put his hand into his pocket, and produced an envelope, presented it to Queenie; again

swung his limp hands over his knees, and protruded his sheep's face towards the girl.

"It is very nice," said she.

"You like it?"

"It is very good—of you."

"Pray keep it."

"I will put it on the mantelshelf."

Queenie got up, and did as she proposed, looked, in so doing, into the mirror over the chimney-piece, and laughed at herself in the glass, then made a little face at Mr Poles, whose back was towards her.

"I find you all alone," said the visitor. "Are you dull? Perhaps you will allow me to do what I can to entertain you?"

The paperhanger had arrived at that period in life when love blows with its second bloom. Most men are like roses in that. They have their spring flowering, and their autumn bloom.

"Thank you—it is quite true I was dull. I was thinking what I could do; I wanted to find something to make me laugh, and so, most aptly, in you came."

"You are fond of amusement?"

"Very. Andrew and I were playing cards one evening, but uncle caught us and carried the cards away. Do you know any game we could play together, Mr Poles, so as to pass the time till Aunt Beulah returns? Puss-in-the-corner requires more than two. So does kiss-in-the-ring."

"Oh, Miss Sant."

Mr Poles became pink in the face.

"Let us play at I-love-my-love-with-an-A."

"I think I know that; I used to play it with Duckie."

"Who is Duckie?"

"Duckie *was*—she belongs to remembrance only. She was my first wife."

"Have you a second?"

"I mean my deceased wife. I always called her Duckie."

"And did she call you Goosie?"

"She called me Sweet P. You know I am Phineas Poles, paperhanger. It was a pretty name, was it not? Sweet P. It is a curious coincidence that P and Q come so close together. Your name is Queenie, and I am Phineas."

"Yes; but so also do O and P go together, and O means nought. Shall we play a game, Mr Poles?"

"Certainly. Charmed."

"I will begin. You must follow. I love my love with an A because he is Amiable. I hate him because he is Absent at the present moment when I particularly want him. I took him to the sign of the Anchor, and treated him to Apricots. His name is—no, Mr Poles, I will not go on further than that; you begin."

"I love my love with an A," said the paperhanger,

looking sentimental, with his head on one side, and his languishing eyes on Queenie, "because she is 'andsome. I do not 'ate her, because that is impossible. But if there be a fault to find with her, I should say she was too Arch. Her name is Adorable, and she lives in Alma Terrace."

Then in at the door came Rab, with his cap on the back of his head, and a pair of rabbits in his hand.

"There, Queen of Love," said he, "I have brought you something."

"Oh!" Up jumped the girl. "How good you are! I love my Rab with an R because he is a Rascal, and has brought me Rabbits, and Phineas Poles, paperhanger, brought me only Photographs. Sit down, Rab."

Mr Poles looked disconcerted. The poacher took no notice of him, and seated himself on the table, with one foot on the ground, swinging the other, and with his hands in his pockets.

"Well, Queenie," said he, "how are you getting on in Alma Terrace?"

"Not very happily, Rab. I get into trouble whatever I do. And now I am to be turned out."

"Turned out, Queen of Love! Then come to me."

She shook her head.

"I am given a billet on the Button's."

"The Button's! You won't be happy there. I have come to tell you good news—news that will please you, little Queen."

The girl turned to Mr Poles.

"I am keeping you from your shop," said she. "I fear Aunt Beulah will not be home for an hour. She is Dorcasing."

The paperhanger looked at Rab, then at Queenie, then at the rabbits.

"Shall we go on with the game?" he asked. "We did not get very far in it."

"Oh, Mr Poles, not now. I daresay Rab will pursue it. And I saw Mr Nottershaw go by with a roll under his arm. I think he must have been on his way to you. Perhaps he wishes to consult you about re-papering his house. I am a naughty little girl to detain you from your business. I will not forget about the photograph. I will give it to Aunt Beulah with your love. You said with your love, did you not? and desired hers in return?"

"I did not say that," gasped the paperhanger. "And I do not think Mr Nottershaw was going to my place."

"He may have been. In business one must snatch at chances."

"I am bothered," said Mr Poles. "It would seem that you wanted to get rid of me. It is very kind of you, my dear, to take such an interest in my

affairs. But, have you forgotten that we have begun and not finished a game?"

"A game! Oh yes, but you did not enter into it with spirit; I suppose, Mr Poles, you are too old to care for games."

The paperhanger, looking more sheepish than when he came in, rose, took up his hat, and somewhat sulkily departed.

"Now, then," said Queenie, "we are alone, Rab. Let me hear the good news."

"I have taken a place as under-ranger," he answered. "You need not fear for me any longer. I will not drink. I will not swear. I will not poach. I will not idle. I am going to be a steady, industrious man."

"I am very glad to hear it," exclaimed Queenie, jumping up. "Pull your paws out of your pockets and give them me—both." She clasped Rab's hands in hers, and shook them. "Oh, you are a good fellow! A real, true, good fellow—I always felt it."

"And yet I live in Heathendom!"

"That has nothing to do with it, Rab. Your heart is in the right place."

"My heart!" he sighed, and Queenie felt that he was drawing her towards him She snatched her hands away. "It is for your sake, Queenie. I can't bear to be thought ill of by you. I can't bear that folk should say—that is the drunken blackguard, the poacher, the good-for-nought—who saved the little

Queen of Love, who carried her in his arms out of the fallen circus. Queenie! I've had a fire burnin' in me ever since that night. I feel it here on this arm that held you, on this shoulder where you rested, on this breast to which you clung. There the fire is consumin'—there it is! and will never out. Nothin' will quench it—not water, not snow—death alone!"

"Poor old Rab, I do like you!"

"Yes, I daresay! I can git no more of you than likin' and gratitude. I must be content with that."

"Rab! if that will satisfy you, I tell you that I like you better than anyone else in the world—except—"

"Except whom?"

He looked up from the floor, on which his eyes had rested.

"Never mind, Rab. I like you as much as I can like anyone, short of—"

"Short of what? Say it out, Queenie!"

"Don't bother me, Rab!" She put her head down on her shoulder, and peeped out at him through her eye corners—it was a trick of hers, as was that of laughing on one side of her face. "I like you very much indeed. I can say no more but this, that it will give me the greatest possible happiness to know that you are doing well. If I dare think I have been the means of making you live an honest and sober

life, I shall hold up my silly head and think there is really something not altogether wicked in me. And, Rab, I have had such a list of my sins read out to me that I had begun to think I was an utterly bad, abandoned little mass of iniquity."

Rab swung his foot and remained silent, looking broodingly before him for a few moments. Then he said,—

"Queen of Love! I do not know how you will get on with the Buttons. She—Ada—folk ain't over fond of her. I don't know what it is in her, or whether it is somethin' not in her, but they do not speak well of her. If you are not happy at Button's, then come to the forest."

"What forest?"

"Delamere. Miles of trees, and there are meres there. 'Tis a wild place, and you would be happy there with the birds and the hares and the trees and bushes. I don't say 'run to me'—that can't be. I know it. But there's my sister there; she is married to a head ranger; her name is Gerard. She is a clean, good woman, very different from me. I suppose she learned to be natty from mother, only did not take so much in hand that she can do no one thing well. Mother is always doing five or six things together, and one doin' gets to undo another. You will like Martha. Martha has been often at me to leave off my idle life and take to something. Now I have

somethin' to make me listen to her. I wish to earn your respect. I do not choose to forfeit your liking."

"You are good, very good, Rab. Now, you really must go."

"Why should I go?"

"Because I wish it."

"May I not play the same game with you, you were playing with old Poles? If it serves to amuse you, I will play!"

"No, you cannot play. I am uneasy. I do not wish to have you found here, and there—there, Rab! I see them coming—Uncle Grice and Andrew. Do go out at the back door and I will put the rabbits in the kitchen. Oh, do go, Rab! my uncle would be so angry if he saw you here—after that affair of Sunday night!"

Rab reluctantly departed through the kitchen.

Then Queenie ran to the window, looked out at Andrew as he came, clapped her hands, laughed, danced from one foot to the other, shook her golden hair, and said,—

"I love my love with an A because he is Amiable. I don't hate him at all now that he is no more Absent; his name is Andrew, and he lives—come in, Andrew! I am so glad you are home—he lives in Alma Terrace!"

CHAPTER V.

ON A GATE.

THE day had arrived for the change of quarters. What Jabez Grice decided on, that was to be carried out, without the smallest alteration. "This day week," he had said, "you go to Button's."

He had said this on the Monday after the affair of the tight-rope; and on the Monday following, Queenie was to shift her place of habitation. Not a day's grace was accorded. Punctual to the day, she and her belongings were to be transferred to the farm-house. Not till she was out of Alma Terrace could Jabez breathe free, certain that no fresh scandal would ensue to be a trouble and offence to him.

The little Queen had been very submissive during the week, but still waters run deep, thought Grice; a child when making no noise is hatching mischief. He had heard, as was inevitable, of her visit to the works. It greatly incensed him, but he did not con-

sider it worth his while to rebuke her for it. She was unaccountable for her actions. She was a conscienceless, soulless, lost creature, under the bondage of evil, moved to mischief by demons, dead to all good influences.

In vain did Beulah entreat delay. Some articles of clothing ordered for Queenie were not ready. The dresses she had worn in the van were altogether unsuitable for one in a farmhouse ; she must be re-clothed from head to foot. It was true she had her suit of mourning ; but she had no ordinary working dresses at all proper for her position. Therefore Beulah asked her brother to allow the girl to continue at No. 4 for a few days longer ; but Grice was inexorable. Moreover, he insisted on the destruction of the muslin dress covered with spangles, and the silver wings.

When Queenie heard that her circus dress was to be consigned to the flames, she was in great distress. She entreated that it might be spared. She wept, she coaxed, she sulked. It was all of no avail. Then she appealed to Andrew. He also endeavoured to move his father, but without much hopes of gaining the point. At last a compromise was effected. Andrew had been made to understand that his father required him to pay attentions to Ada Button. Andrew ingeniously took advantage of this, and promised, if his father would lock up the gown instead of destroying it, that he would visit the Button's

at least twice a week, and that he would do his utmost to be agreeable to the young lady.

"I haven't been quite honest about it," said Andrew to Queenie, "for I should have gone to Button's whether the frock were burned or preserved, for I could not rest without seeing you and making sure you were happy. To save my conscience I must be extra polite to Ada."

Queenie inquired of Jabez in what capacity she was to be received at the farm. Her uncle told her that she was to make herself useful there. In Alma Terrace there was not much for her to do, and the devil always finds work for idle hands. She must learn to work. Heaven forbid that she should spend her time in play, and that her mind should be given up to frivolity! Ada would find her employment. For all that was necessary she should have money, but Jabez told her he must have what was allowed accounted for in a satisfactory manner to himself and Beulah. No spangled dresses, no packs of cards, nothing connected with pomps and vanities were to be allowed for in her expenditure.

Queenie delayed her departure till the return of Andrew from the salt pans on Monday afternoon. Her box had been sent on in a wheel-barrow, but she had a bundle, and that she made Andrew carry for her.

The day was bright, there had been frost in the air.

The leaves of the trees were touched. Button's farm was at a sufficient distance to the west of the factories not to be badly poisoned by the smoke. In Cheshire, the prevailing winds are from the sea, and the fumes of the slack burned under the pans blight the vegetation to the east far more than in another direction.

The sun was setting. A haze was in the air, and the air was musical with green and gold-backed flies that congregated against every sunny wall, in parliaments, to discuss what was to be done with themselves during the approaching winter. Dock leaves in the hedges had turned blood colour, and bramble leaves were of rainbow tints. The maples were sulphur-yellow, the sycamores had shrivelled to a dirty ash-grey, and the leaves were speckled with black as though ink had been squirted over them. A ploughman was breaking the glebe in a field by the road-side, and as he ploughed he sang,—

> "The farmer turns round with a smile and a joke,
> 'Tis four o'clock past, boys, 'tis time to unyoke!
> Unharness your horses, and rub 'em down well,
> I'll give you a mug of my humming brown ale.
> With rubbing and scrubbing, I swear and I vow,
> We're all jolly fellows that follow the plough!"

Andrew and Queenie walked along, listening to the man's song. Their hearts were full. She felt, more than she cared to show before her uncle and aunt, that she was unhappy at being turned out of the house at

Alma Terrace. In her heart, she knew that it was best so. She and the elder Grices could never agree. Yet there was humiliation in being summarily dismissed the only house that could, in any fashion, be regarded by her as a home, and it was a grief to her to be separated from Andrew, the only one whom she really regarded, now that her dear father was no more. It was, perhaps, with her as with Andrew, the complete contrast in their characters which made her hold to him; but that was not all. There was in the young man a something which she admired, and which exercised considerable power over her—his strong conscientiousness. She respected, moreover, whilst she wondered at his submission to, his reverence for, his father.

Andrew's heart was a prey to mixed emotions. He really loved the little girl, but he knew that it would not be fitting for him to marry her. He was infinitely distressed at losing her, yet he was obliged to allow to himself that it was best for him that they should be separated.

Now that the moment for parting had come, he could hardly speak, so full was his heart, such a lump was in his throat.

They had reached the gate into Button's drive, and both leaned on it, looking in at the bushes, rank and overgrown, and smelling of decay under the withering touch of autumn.

"Don't let us look in there," said Queenie. "It is all so dismal."

"Well—shall we part here?"

"No, Andrew, not yet!"

Without more ado, the girl climbed on the gate and seated herself on the topmost bar.

"See, Andrew! So we can look at the sun, and watch him go down. Is he not red—red as a dahlia."

He leaned on the gate, and looked up into her face. The evening sun was on her, suffusing it with rose, and glowing with incomparable glory in her hair—every strand of which seemed luminous with an inner fire. Her dark eyes were kindled; two suns were mirrored in the agate-brown orbs.

"Come up on the rail," she pleaded. "Then, here we will sit till the sun is quite set; and when the last spark goes out, then I will go away to my new lodging. Home I have none. My camp is always on the move."

"I do not think the gate will bear us both."

"Yes it will. Silly Andrew, do you not see it rests on the gravel, not solely on the hinges."

He could not refuse her. Their intimacy, which had been so frank and guileless, was to come to an end. They might meet again, but hardly in the same way. They could not be alone together as frequently as they had been.

So Andrew gave a leap, and he was perched on the

top rail of the garden gate beside Queenie, with the setting sun in his eyes.

The western sky was gorgeous with colour—amber, copper, scarlet, carmine, primrose; and above the glory that was wrapped about the declining orb was a tract of the purest translucent green. Bluish-white mists hung over the earth.

Another minute and the sun would be behind a dark belt of cloud that lay on the horizon.

"Hark!" said Queenie. "Do you hear that little finch in the bushes? She says chink! chink! I can make that noise and hold conversation with her. Listen to me!"

She closed her palms, interweaving the fingers, and then brought her hands down on one knee sharply. The air between her palms, in escaping, made a sound like the call of the bird.

"I can do better than that," said Andrew. "Listen to me."

He began to rock on the gate.

"Don't do that, Andrew; you will bring the gate down."

"Not I—listen. Do you hear? As the gate swings, it squeaks out Quee — nie, Quee — nie!"

"Nothing of the sort. Let me rock the gate. It says Quee—quee! Quee—quee!"

"To me it is Queenie!"

"If nothing speaks to you of Queenie when I am gone, other than creaky gates, I won't say much for the remembrance of me you bear away."

"On the contrary, everything will say Queenie, Queenie, to me."

Then he sighed, and she sighed in response.

"Hark!" said the girl. "The ploughman has ceased his song."

"Yes. I hear the clank of chains. He is unharnessing, and will go home; a summons, that, to me, to do the same."

"The sun is not yet set."

"I think so."

"No, it is behind that black cloud. Wait, and it will peep out again. Look! look! a spark of fire!"

The sun, which had been obscured by the cloud-bar, now suddenly flared up in a great conflagration; it sent flame over the whole landscape, it fired the trees, it blazed in the clouds, it rolled like a sea of glory over the young people seated on the gate, dazzling them, and forcing them to lower their heads. The ploughman went by, driving his team, and, as he went, he sang,—

> "Unharness your horses, and rub 'em down well,
> I'll give you a mug of my humming brown ale!
> With rubbing and scrubbing, I swear and I vow,
> We're all jolly fellows that follow the plough."

The sun was in his eyes, he did not notice those perched on the gate to Button's drive.

What shadows were cast by the man and horses! After they were round the corner, the shadows were still spun out, grotesque, monstrous.

"It is the last glow," said Queenie, sorrowfully. "Hold me, Andrew, whilst I turn on the gate."

He put his arm to her—it wound itself round her waist as Queenie lifted her feet and revolved on the top bar, so that her face was directed in the opposite direction to that of Andrew.

"Now I can see our two shadows," said she; "and the sun on the drive. When the light is extinguished, and the shadows all melt together, then I shall slip down on one side of the gate, you slip off on the other, and we part."

"Meantime, we are side by side."

"For one half second."

His hand was under her heart. He felt it beating. Oh, little Queenie, little Queenie! thought Andrew. If only—if only—matters were other than they are. Now her golden hair, hanging down her back, caught the glory of the sun.

Andrew's eyes were on the setting orb. Already the conflagration was reduced. A great slice out of the red globe was taken. Slowly, reluctantly, the sun swelled to thrice its wonted size as he went down in the west. Now half was gone. The light on the

road was less brilliant. The beech and maple were no longer trees of flame. Peering through the railings was a bush of white berries, commonly called the snowball tree. Every snowball had been converted into a ball of gold. Now each was reverting to its original whiteness.

A wild duck went by, high aloft, on her way to one of the great meres in the forest; the sun blazed on her white plumage. Neither Andrew nor Queenie saw her. His eyes were on the expiring sun; hers on the gravel walk, on the fast-fading shadows.

"Queenie!"

Andrew turned his head.

"Yes, Andrew?"

She turned hers.

"The sun has set."

His voice shook. He drew her closer to him, and their lips met. Then, without another word, he slipped down on his side of the gate, she on hers. Neither looked back, neither spoke again, but each, with bowed head, went on—Andrew towards Saltwich, Queenie towards Button's.

CHAPTER VI

"A CHANCE CAUGHT"

As Andrew walked slowly homewards, his conscience was uneasy. He had kissed Queenie, not with a light and laughing kiss that was half joke, but seriously, with overflowing heart; and he felt that he had done wrong. Weak he was, and his love for Queenie had overmastered his judgment. He had done her a wrong. He had encouraged that affection for him which had sprung up in her innocent heart, and he ought to have done what lay in his power to check a passion which was foredoomed to be blighted. He must go forward in this course, or at once retreat, and, as far as possible, stop the mischief done. Could he trample down his scruples, blind his eyes to the consequences, turn his back on his principles and defy his father? This was a step too bold for one such as Andrew to take. Reverence for his father had been ingrained in him. His principles were dear to him, constituted the best part of him; and his intelligence

told him that the bringing up of a circus girl, or rather the sort of bringing up he supposed a circus girl must have had, was not such as could make of her one calculated to assure his happiness. If he were to marry Queenie, he must step out of the society of the Seriously-Minded and descend into that of the worldlings, the frivolous. He must break with old associations, do violence to old, deep-rooted convictions. He would place himself on an incline on which he could not maintain himself, but must slip further and further down, losing the respect of his old companions, and forfeiting what was worse—his own self-respect.

Queenie had shown herself so different, if not hostile, to the principles and decent order which he had come to regard as forming the essence of religion, that he could not hope to bring her round to a more sober and serious view. He was too diffident in himself to believe that he had the power to turn her about to see as he saw, feel as he felt, think as he thought. He was, perhaps, conscious that there was in her more strength of purpose, notwithstanding her childishness, than in himself. He knew her roguish ways, dreaded her fascination. It was far more likely that she would seduce him to take a lower course than that he should be able to persuade her to step to his higher platform. What was to be done? He regretted that he had promised his father to visit Button's twice a week. It would have been expedient for him and for

Queenie that he should stay away. A visit to Button's entailed a sight of Queenie; and, if he saw her, he was sure his affection would reawake, after he had attempted to send it to sleep.

When Andrew reached Alma Terrace, he found that his father was out. He was glad of this. He did not desire a conversation with "Hammer" just then. His heart was too much in commotion, his brain too full of clouds. He took up a book and pretended to read. But his mind was too much occupied for him to pay attention to the words before him; and Beulah, who looked up from her work occasionally, saw that he turned over no pages, and that his eyes were fixed on vacancy.

On Tuesday evening Mr Grice was at home. No committee required his presence, no platform claimed his eloquence.

It was obvious to Andrew that his father had resolved to come to close quarters with him that evening. He knew it from the way in which his father eyed him, from the way in which he cut his meat, stuck it into his mouth, closed his jaws when satisfied, and folded his lips inward on his teeth.

Nothing, however, was said so long as Beulah was engaged in removing the plates and cloth. Jabez took up his newspaper as soon as he had done eating, and lit his pipe, but Andrew could not stir without his father's eye travelling beyond the sheet in his

direction, and watching what he was about. He had risen from his place to remove little Queenie's chair, and put it away between the end of the chiffonier and the wall. It would be no longer needed, and its presence was a reminder that gave him pain.

Had Andrew attempted to leave the room, he was well assured that a peremptory word from his father would have arrested him. He therefore remained where he was, awaiting what was imminent.

Beulah was now in the back kitchen.

"Shut that door!" ordered "Hammer," waving his newspaper in the direction in which his sister had retreated. "Have you been to Button's to-day?"

Andrew answered,—

"No, father, this is but Tuesday."

And he crossed the room and did what he was ordered.

"Do you know how Brundrith became a millionaire?"

"Yes—I have heard he once had a flat" (barge).

"Right—and his sister Sally kept a little shop, oranges, lollipops; and sold salt-herrings by the pennyworth, and peppermints by the ounce."

"So I have been told."

"And now they do not know what to do with their money. Brundrith had a chance. He took it. To every man a chance is given once. If he be wise, he seizes it. Then his future is assured.

He becomes great. If he be a fool, he lets it slip. Then Providence passes him by, leaves him in the gutter, gives him not another. Brundrith saw that the door was open. He put in his foot; where he put in his foot, there he thrust in his knee; where the knee went, the thigh followed. Then came the shoulder. He was in, and shut the door on others. Sally has been carried in with him, and the herrings and peppermints left outside, for such as stood rubbing their hands and asking themselves whether the door was ajar or not. The red herrings by the penny-worth and the peppermints by the ounce is all they will have. Everything else that the world can give is for Brundrith, because he saw his chance and took it. The salt was the means. The salt has been turned into gold. What Brundrith has done, another can do, when the chance is given him."

"No such chance has been offered you, father."

"Chances do not come always in youth. They come, no one knows when. Now the opportunity has come."

"Whence, father?"

"From Heaven. Where else could it come from?"

"And you will lay hold?"

"I—if it rested only with *me*, there would be no doubt whatever. I am not one to fly in the face of Providence. I am not one to shut my eyes on opportunities. You are other. At one time I could count

on you. But since that circus girl came into my house, you have been other than you were. I do not say that you are wholly given up to skipping-ropes, butterflies and all that, but you are no longer reliable."

"But what do you wish me to do, father?"

"It is this in a nutshell—nutshell. Don't think I forget that nutshell at the undenominational meeting. That was a token of how you were going. When I heard it crack, I felt that my confidence in you was broken. I will tell you what the chance is. You take it and we are made men—you and I. Refuse it, and we are left outside, with the red herrings for a penny and, please, sir, an ounce of peppermints."

"What is this chance, father?"

"In a word—Ada Button." Jabez Grice paused, clenched his teeth, and his dark whiskers formed a halo round his mouth, broken only by the nose. "It is this," he continued, after having eyed his son with that commanding, threatening face that made Andrew quake, as it made every workman under Grice quake. "Tom Button, Nottershaw and I have a scheme. We are going to set up a salt factory at Button's and run against Brundrith. Button furnishes the land, Nottershaw the men and the material, I the brains. If we get the thing afloat, we are made men. Brundrith must come to terms, buy us up, and take us into partnership. Then the salt will not be turned into gold in Brundrith's pocket, but in the pockets of

Brundrith, Grice & Company. The public demand salt. They must have salt. They will pay for it anything in reason, from four-and-six up to twenty shillings a ton. We have a vast market—the British Isles, Canada, the States, India. Pshaw! Brundrith has nibbled. We will bite when we are Brundrith & Grice."

"Are you going to give up your situation at Brundrith's?"

"Not yet. I keep in the background. Brundrith is not to know that I am in the scheme. Button and Nottershaw show till I am ready. But Button and Nottershaw can do nothing without me."

"And what has Ada with this?"

"I am not going into it unless you marry Ada Button. Old Tom is slippery. Always has been. I must have him bound down, that his interests and mine shall be one. By some means or other I have a chance of sinking money in the concern—not my money, but other money trusted to me—and I must make sure of that. Unless I am quite satisfied that Button is safe, I'll not trust a penny on this land. The sum is three thousand pounds or thereabouts. Nottershaw will supply the remainder—all rests with you. Ada is my guarantee."

"And you are sure that this scheme will answer?"

"Absolutely certain. It cannot fail. You and I are made men. Have you been to Brundrith's place?

Have you seen the house, the park? Do you know whose they were?—they belonged to the Marquess of Caistor. Where are the Caistors now? With horse-racing, cards and the divorce court, gone to pieces every way; and in their mansion that has been theirs for ages—on their land that was theirs from the Conquest, sits Jack Brundrith, the bargeman, who, not thirty years ago, would touch his cap and say 'Thank'ee sir!' for a shilling. There is a room in that house, where once a lady of that family refused a king—so the story goes—though he knelt to her. King or pretender I cannot say which; I know and care nothing for history. But in that room sits now old Sally, smoking cigarettes against her asthma, and cackling with mirth as she tells the story how she sold pennyworths of red herrings and peppermints by the ounce. You have been about. You have seen some of the grand estates and noble houses round Delamere. Which would you like? You can have anyone. But a few years, and we can pour out gold like water, and buy land where we will."

Andrew's cheek flushed, and his eye sparkled.

"That is not all," continued Grice. "I do not care for show. Conservatories, and pineries, and preserves, and carriages, and liveried servants are not what I covet. A few years and I shall be M.P. Brundrith might have been member had he chosen. He did not

care for politics. He liked business. Business with me is but a passage leading to political power. Wait, Andrew, till I am in the House. Then there will be a name by which reformers will swear, and that will be Grice. When I am in Parliament, then the Lords may say good-bye to their House, and the Crown will have to do without royal grants, and the Church get on in disendowment and disestablishment, and the Colonies will have to shift for themselves, and England learn to do without a foreign policy. Look here—" A fly was on the mantelshelf. Grice leaned forward with his hand bent into a curve, whisked, and the fly was caught. He crushed it, and threw it on the table before his son. "That's your chance; catch, and you are made!"

"You spring this on me, father."

"How long do you require in which to make up your mind?"

"Give me a week or two."

"Not above a day or two. Chances must be caught like that fly—at once—or they spread their wings and are gone—gone for ever. Providence will not endure fooling. With it, it is Yes or No."

"Give me till Thursday."

"Thursday at 4 P.M., not a minute beyond. At 4 P.M. I have your answer, and I go at once to Nottershaw and the thing is done. To-morrow you go to Button's."

"On what excuse can I go?"

"None—but that you go with me."

In the perplexed situation in which Andrew was placed, or had slipped into, he was prepared to accept the proposal of his father as the best means of escape from his difficulties.

A man not strong by nature, and debilitated still further by reliance on a strong will, and who is conscious of this weakness, is ready to act with rashness in matters of importance, and by so doing to exhibit most conclusively his own feebleness.

The situation in which Andrew found himself was such that he could extricate himself from it only by doing violence to his heart or to his head.

He was sliding further and further into love with Queenie, retreat was difficult, and he shrank from going forward. The only escape from his dilemma was that offered by his father—that of throwing up an insurmountable barrier between himself and Queenie —by that means alone could he be saved from her—could he be saved from himself. His father had condemned Queenie and commended Ada. Andrew never stopped to question whether his father's judgments were well grounded. With some folk an assertion is accepted as equivalent to a demonstration, especially if the assertion be made in a loud voice and without hesitation.

The prospect of wealth opened before Andrew

dazzled him, but did not influence him to anything like the degree that did his desire to put himself in a firm position, and escape from the difficulties into which he had allowed himself to be drawn. Next day, Wednesday, he accompanied his father to Button's.

On leaving, Jabez said,—

"All is in train now—everything awaits your answer."

"You can have it immediately," said Andrew in a despondent tone. "I have been talking to Ada. It shall be as you wish."

"Caught! Andrew! Caught! Well done, Andrew!"

CHAPTER VII

BUTTON'S

"QUEENIE! my dear little Queenie! I am so delighted to see you. It is an age since I saw your bonny face."

One minute later,—

"How do you do, Ada? I hope you are well, and that your father's lumbago is better."

The first at the door, the second in the parlour. Unhappily, the exclamation, the salutation at the door were perfectly audible to the person addressed in the parlour.

Ada Button, with a face of marble, received Andrew. With a slight curl of her thin lips she said,—

"You seem to be vastly pleased to see *her*."

"Queenie! Oh yes. It is a week—no, nine whole days since we met."

"Oh, you count the days, do you?"

"I cannot help knowing how the time passes, Ada, I have so much to ask her."

"Exactly—to inquire whether she is ill-treated in this house, given enough to eat, bread and butter or bread and scrape; what she thinks of me, whether she approves of me—and so on. Thank you. I should prefer not to be discussed with a domestic."

"I did not mean that. Indeed, I did not. And your father's lumbago?"

"It is we who suffer from lumbago when he pretends to have it. We suffer—whether it be from lumbago or not, I cannot say. The house is unbearable on such occasions. Perhaps you want to discuss the manners and temper of my father with that girl?"

"You mistake me, Ada. I am sorry you are put out."

"Put out! Such matters do not put me out! But I do not like to see you demean yourself. *Dear little Queenie!*"—she imitated Andrew's salutation. "This dear little Queenie, remember, is a common circus girl."

"She is my cousin."

"She is no relation of yours."

"She calls my father uncle, and my aunt is her aunt also."

"She calls them uncle and aunt, glad enough to hang on to respectability as best she may."

"You wrong her, Ada."

"Of course. She is all that is dear and good. I am all that is objectionable and bad."

A silence ensued. Andrew was afraid to say anything. He looked in her face. No emotion was visible in it, and he hoped that her words were sharper than her feelings.

After that the silence had been prolonged sufficiently to become embarrassing, Ada said,—

"I suppose you know, Andrew, the new arrangement?"

"What new arrangement?"

"You have not been consulted. Nor have I. It is not the way with fathers to consult their children, but to decide for them. All has been settled, independently of our wishes, by the two who rule our destinies. My father has for some time made no secret of his impatience to leave this house. He never allows one to see exactly what he wants. If he professes something very strongly, I expect to find him manœuvring in an opposite direction. But in the matter of wanting to get away from here I believe he spoke the truth. He intends to leave as soon as we are married. As the works are to be here, he says the place will become intolerable. But your father is the leading spirit. He is to take the complete management of the salt factory; he and father have set their heads together to start. As that factory is to be here, here Mr Grice says he must be. We are to occupy this house and be saddled with your father. There has been no question whether I should desire

this or not. In his peremptory manner he has settled it all, and we must sigh and endure. Where my father is going, I do not know and do not care to ask. I should not be in the least surprised if he went to America!"

"America! But he is to be one of the firm."

"Yes. He will give the land. What does he know about salt manufacture? So long as he has his dividends, his money, and can amuse himself, he will be satisfied. I suppose he will be of no more use after he has lent his name and delivered over the land. He will draw a revenue from the factory, get his share of profits, and spend it as he pleases."

"You surprise me."

"Don't take me as your authority, and proclaim that he is going to America. I only think he has it in his mind, because he talks so much of sticking to the old country. That makes me suspect he intends to turn his back on it. What concerns me is, that, having been rid of his humours, we should be afflicted with your father's despotism. He had far better spend a hundred pounds and build a lodge at the gates, and settle in there. He will be a nuisance in the house with us."

"My father never can be that. You really will see very little of him, he is in such request. Besides, he will be so greatly occupied on the works."

"It is always said that young people when they

marry should be together, and no third party be with them. I foresee unpleasantnesses."

"I assure you, you will find my father of value in the house. You can consult him in any difficulty, and when in doubt."

"I—consult! I consult no one but myself!"

Andrew had been happy about his engagement. He felt a sensible relief at having his future marked out for him. The only occasion on which he had deviated from his father's wishes he had been landed in embarrassment. Now there was nothing to vex him. He had not to rack his mind as to alternative courses which he might pursue. His line of life was mapped out for him, and he was content it should be so.

He had no great affection for Ada. He did not dislike her; he rather liked her. She was decided in her views, knew exactly what she wanted, had marked dislikes, and that was satisfactory. It would save him trouble. She was very good-looking; cold she certainly was, but as in Andrew there was no ardour, he was content that the courtship should be conducted at a temperate heat. Flames and raptures were not demanded of him by Ada, and Andrew was content not to have to furnish them. A cool, practical love-making was all she expected, and all that he was prepared to supply. Never before had he been witness in her of an outbreak of something like

jealousy, and what was certainly a display of bad temper. He was offended at the way in which she disparaged Queenie, and at the contemptuous allusions to her own father and his.

As Andrew left, he walked slowly down the drive. The moon was near its full, and was shining out of a cloudless sky; the laurel leaves were converted into plates of silver, and the snowberries were little globes of light, stars amid the dark bushes.

At the gate into the drive, Andrew found Queenie leaning against the post, waiting for him. She had nothing on her head or shoulders, though the night air was cool.

The young man came up to her without a word, and then she said in a low tone,—

"Oh, Andrew! Is this true?"

"What, Queenie?"

"You are not surely going to be married to *her?*"

"Yes, indeed I am."

"Oh, Andrew!"

Queenie turned away from him, leaned her elbows on the top rail of the gate, and folded her hands and looked over them into the road, upon the meadows and fields bathed in moonlight.

"From the tone of your voice I can find that you do not approve."

"I am sorry—sorry for you, Andrew. But I will say nothing more."

"I should have been glad had you been contented. I value your approval very greatly, little Queen of Love. But we must not speak together about *her*. She is already nettled, thinking we have discussed her between us, and we have done nothing of the sort, for I have not met you since we parted on this gate in the setting sun. I have not had the chance of meeting you, though I have been to the house repeatedly. Have you been hiding from me?"

"No, Andrew; she sent me into the laundry."

"And how are you?"

"I am well."

"Do you like being here better than at Alma Terrace?"

"That is not a fair question, especially as you have forbidden me to speak of *her*."

"Well, we must hope for the best. When I come to live here, we shall see each other every day, and see a great deal of each other, and I will do all I can to make you happy."

"You are coming here?"

"Yes; and Mr Button leaves. My father comes as well. That is the arrangement."

Queenie continued looking at the moonlit fields from over her folded hands.

"Poor Andrew!" she said, musingly, and the

words escaped her involuntarily. "Poor, poor Andrew!"

The young man, still smarting under the sharp tongue of Ada, was afraid of hearing words relative to her, of doing what Ada had told him he was intending to do—of discussing her with Queenie.

"My father is so sanguine," said he. "He feels confident that we shall become very rich. He and Mr Button are going to start a pump here, for extracting brine from the run under our feet. And we are to have pans here and make salt. In a few years we shall be as rich as Brundrith; and I need not tell you, Queenie, that, if I get rich, you shall share in all."

"Thank you, Andrew; but riches will not make me happy."

"Are you unhappy, little Queen?"

She did not answer at once. Presently she said,—

"I suppose I am in a wrong place. I am a peg that does not fit in any hole to which I am applied. I was out of place at the Rainbows' cottage; I was out of place at your house in Alma Terrace; I am out of place here. I wish a circus would come by, then I would run away, join it, and, I daresay, would be happy again, for I should be *in* place in a tent."

"Oh, nonsense! It is only that the life into which

you have been put by Providence is strange to you. Now, let us talk of something else. I suppose you will be bridesmaid at the wedding."

"I—I, Andrew?"

"Yes; has it not been settled?"

"No; certainly not. It cannot be."

"Why not?"

"*She* manages that. She will never ask *me*."

"Let me speak to her about it."

"On no account, Andrew. It is not possible."

"Well, all will mend when I am married. Then I shall be in the house, and I will see that nothing worries you—that you are made comfortable and happy."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. I love you too well, little Queen, not to do everything for you that is in my power. Give me your hand."

"My hand—why?"

"Because we must part. You must go in. The night is cold, and you have nothing over you."

"My hand as good-bye—yes."

She extended one hand to him, without removing the other from the bar of the gate, or turning her head to look at him. He pressed her hand. Then he opened the gate, and, in so doing, had to make Queenie step back. She did so, and remained with her elbow as before. When he was through, she replaced the

arm that she had extended to him as it had been, and continued looking at the silvered landscape.

"Queen of Love!"

She started. A man's voice! She looked round. A man had stepped into the drive out of the bushes, between her and the house.

CHAPTER VIII

ROARING MEG

Rab Rainbow had settled into his employment as under-keeper in Delamere Forest, and found, to his surprise, that honest work was more grateful to his feelings than idleness broken only by occasional poaching excursions.

His contentment would have been unbounded had he not been consumed with the daily desire to see, or at least hear of, Queenie, and had he been able to entertain the smallest hope that his suit might in the end be successful. He surmised rather than knew that she preferred Andrew to himself. When the tidings reached him that young Grice was engaged to Ada Button, his heart leaped and his hope revived.

Then an overwhelming desire came on him to go to Saltwich and see both Andrew and Queenie. He was filled with an almost passionate gratitude to the

former for having stepped out of his way. Andrew had discovered what was obvious to Rab—that he was not suited to make the little Queen happy. He had considered that the claims of Rab on the girl were so great, that he could not justly oppose them. How that Andrew, having to choose a wife, could take Ada Button, when he might have Queenie, was explicable in no other way.

Therefore Rab Rainbow longed to see his late rival, to clasp his hand, and tell him he had acted like a man; and that he, Rab, would ever be to him a faithful and devoted friend. He would say to him: "Andrew, whenever you are in necessity, call on me. Command me for what you like. You might have had the Queen of Love, and you have stood aside and left her for me. You have taken one who is not comparable to her, whom you cannot love, because you saw that Rab Rainbow, who had saved her life, had the first right to her; because you saw that she could never be happy linked to one so prim, so grave, so dull as yourself. God grant that this other one, this Ada Button, may recompense you for what you have given up." Thus would he, Rab, speak to Andrew, when they met. But he would see the Queen of Love also. Now, surely, she would acknowledge her debt to him, and recompense him with the only recompense he desired. Now he was in work, he had taken a cottage in the forest near Oak Mere,

where he managed for himself. It was snug, it was spacious, it cried out for a woman to be therein and make of it a pleasant home. What objection could Queenie find against him now? He had hardly been to a tavern since he had assured her he would be sober. He had cast off his old evil life, he had entered on a new and good one, and she must crown this new life and assure him against relapse.

Hip-ho-la! Rab leaped as he went along.

When he came home from his work, from ranging the forest, and threw open his door, he would see a slim little figure seated by the fire, throwing on pine cones, bushes of heather, and making a glorious blaze in which she would shine as an angel of light.

Hip-ho-la! He would dig up the garden before the cottage, and plant it with sweet lavender, with white lilies and yellow marigolds. He would train a monthly rose about the window, which would flower till the New Year came. He would have pots of geranium in the little window, hang bunches of wild thyme from the ceiling, making the atmosphere sweet.

Hip-ho-la! as he stood in the door, with his gun slung at his back, then little Queenie would start from her seat by the fire and come towards him, with arms extended, with the sun in her golden hair, and love in her dancing eyes, with a flush purer than the

pink of the monthly rose in her cheeks—all to welcome him home.

Hip-ho-la! He stumbled, and at that moment Mr Nottershaw drove by.

"Heigh!" shouted Rab, and pulled a red-spotted kerchief out of his pocket, and swung it over his head.

In his impatience to reach Saltwich he was ready to have recourse to a trick so as to get helped on his way.

The builder and surveyor drew up.

"What is the matter?"

"You have dropped your pocket-handkerchief."

Mr Nottershaw felt in his greatcoat pockets before he looked at that offered him. When he saw that in Rab's hand, he said,—

"Get along—that is not mine. I do not use such rags as that."

"Then, if you will not own it, I shall pocket it myself. Would you mind, sir, now you have stopped, giving me a lift to Saltwich?"

"I'm not going to the town, but to my place."

"That's just above Button's?"

"Yes, and I shall turn off the road and cut across by Chadwick's and the Bramble Brook."

"All the same to me. I want to go to Button's."

"Then jump in, and welcome. The Bramble Brook way ain't a very good way, but it cuts off a couple of

miles, and saves going round by the town. Jump up beside me, Rainbow, and you can open the gates for me, and save my descending. The cob is not amiable over gates."

Rab mounted the trap. A vacant place was beside Mr Nottershaw.

"What are you going to Button's for?" asked the builder.

"My fortune, sir."

"What—are you going into the salt concern?"

"I do not understand."

"You haven't heard? Button and I are going to open a campaign against Brundrith, and see if we cannot make our fortunes out of the salt as well as he, and draw to us some of the custom of the world, instead of letting him monopolise it."

"No, sir, I've nothing to do with salt."

"Then what is the fortune you seek at Button's?"

"Only a girl, sir."

"A girl! Is she an heiress? Andrew Grice has been before you, Rainbow, and snapped up the lovely Ada. Will you step down and open that gate? We turn off the main road here. It ain't much of a road, but we have light, and shall get along."

Rab jumped out of the trap and threw the gate wide. Before them was a footpath and tracks of wheels; obviously not a much-frequented way, nor one maintained by the parish. There was a right

across the fields and down the valley of Bramble Brook for foot-passengers; no objection was made to the path being taken by a buggy or cart, but there was no right for wheeled vehicles on it.

Rab re-ascended to his place.

"So—a girl's your fortune," said Nottershaw. "I did not know there were other gilded girls available, save Ada Button."

"She as I seek has no other gold but what grows on her head. I want no money—I want but her. If I have her my fortune is made."

"But how so?"

"I am made—she can do what she wills with me. If I do not get her, then I am utterly undone and cast away."

"That is folly, Rainbow. I know you have turned over a new leaf, and very glad have I been to hear that it was so, but good conduct should not hang on to a woman's petticoat."

"A chap must have an object; he cannot work without hope. If you have a fire in your heart —a fire of disappointment and love that is not quenched—you go mad, you do what you can to forget about it. You are reckless when the morrow will be to you as to-day—without a hope. So it is with me. If I don't get her, I shall go to pieces again—I know it."

They had crossed the field, and now were in

a lane that led down hill, in the Bramble Brook Glen.

"Hold hard!" said Nottershaw. "What is that noise?"

A howling, bellowing, hissing was heard.

"It is Meg roaring," shouted Rab. "Get down, sir, it is not safe to proceed."

"We will tie up the cob," said Nottershaw. "I've heard of Roaring Meg, but never have seen her in one of her fits."

"Step warily," cautioned Rab. "When Meg roars there is mischief somewhere."

The builder and contractor fastened his horse to a gate, and then came on down the lane.

Suddenly Rab stood still, and as Mr Nottershaw was about to pass him, he extended his arm and checked him.

"Look, sir, the roadway is gone."

It was so; a funnel-like gap had opened in the path, and went down, it was not possible to say how far. In the failing light, it seemed an entrance to the bottomless pit.

"The water has not come—it will be here soon. Look at that holly tree."

In the hedge was a bush, almost a tree, and Nottershaw, now that his attention was drawn to it, saw it sink; first the hedge in which it grew disappeared, then the trunk, then the leaves.

Rab ran back the lane to where he had seen a rick of straw. He hastily tore out a bundle, came down the lane again with it flaming. He had struck a match and kindled it. Now he held the blazing straw over the gulf, and Nottershaw could see the reflection in the glossy leaves of the holly as the tree went down. Presently they ceased to reflect the light —all was black below.

"The water won't come till Meg has done roaring," said Rab. "Come on, sir, and see Meg at it."

He climbed the hedge, and the surveyor followed him. From the top of the bank they could see some way down the valley. About four hundred yards off, a geyser-like spout was visible, blowing out of the side of the hill, flinging about lumps of gypsum and stones. It was white as steam.

"Jump, sir!"

Rab leaped from the hedge into the field, and ran on, the builder after him, till they came near the orifice, whence burst the column of foam. The force and fury with which it raged were alarming. The noise of the roar was deafening. Rab and Nottershaw stood above it on the slope, out of the way of the jet; every now and then a ball of marl or crystallised mass of gypsum was shot like a rocket far beyond the body of white foam. No steam rolled away, so that it was evident that the jet was in no degree warm. It

sent waves down the brook, sweeping over the fields, and washing about the trunks of trees. A mile below was a mill. In a minute or two the mill-pond would overflow.

"I've known the miller grind corn for a couple of days, the wheel turned by strong brine. That which Meg is spitting forth is all brine."

"It is very strange," said Nottershaw.

"The way I explain it is this," said Rab. "The salt rock comes near the surface somewhere, and the water gets to it, dissolves it, and then there is a reservoir underground, unsupported in any way, save by the sides, which are continuously becomin' consumed by more water eating into them. Then at last the roof falls in, and when it falls in, it drives the brine forth at the weakest place in the surface of the land, and that is here, where Roaring Meg is spouting. There must be as much brine come away as there is earth falls in. There's Chadwick's orchard, where I've stolen bushels of apples as a boy, is now all down, and a flash in its place. You see the crust of earth has given way in the lane. It's fortunate we heard Meg roaring, or we might have driven on and been swallowed up like that there holly tree."

"I'll go back, and get out of this lane as fast as I can."

"We cannot go for'ard—that is impossible. We

must go back and get into the high road, and go round by Saltwich."

Both returned over the field, and across the hedge to where the cob and buggy had been left. The horse was munching grass, ripping it from the hedge in unconcern.

"I'll have another look at that hell-hole," said Nottershaw. "Hold my hand. By ginger! I don't half like going near it in the twilight."

The surveyor approached cautiously.

"A precious uncomfortable thing it would be to go down there," said he.

"I don't know that one sort of death is much worse than another, if die we must!" answered Rab.

"I ain't superstitious," said Nottershaw, "but I wouldn't be easy in my mind if I thought *that* was to be my end."

"Who goes in there never comes out again. No coffin, no Christian burial for him. The sea may give up her dead, not the breast o' mother earth. When she opens her mouth and gulps, there is no casting forth agin till the Judgment Day."

"Wrr! I don't like it. By ginger! Rainbow, I could almost fancy I saw the red eyes of the Evil One looking up at me from below! Let us get away as quick as we can. I shall dream of this. Wrr! it has made my blood run cold!"

"They say that when Meg roars she is askin' for a life."

"So long as it is not mine—I am content. Whom can she be calling for now?"

"Ay—who?"

CHAPTER IX.

A PROMISE.

"QUEEN of Love!"

When the girl turned, she recognised Rab.

Rab had been set down by Nottershaw in Saltwich. He had gone to Alma Terrace and inquired for Andrew. Miss Grice was at home; she informed him that he had gone to the Button's.

Accordingly, the young man walked to the Button's gate. He did not feel justified in going down the drive, and knocking at the house door, and inquiring after Andrew or Queenie. He accordingly secreted himself among the evergreens, and waited. Andrew would leave shortly; then he intended to speak to him, and get him to contrive for him a meeting with Queenie.

He had not been long ensconced in the bushes before the girl herself appeared alone. She went to the gate, and leaned on it, looking at the moon.

Rab's first impulse was to issue at once from his hiding-place and speak to her. But he desisted from so doing, as almost immediately he heard the front door of the house opened and Andrew's voice bidding good-night to his intended bride.

Then a feeling of curiosity came over him to see how Queenie and Andrew met, and to hear what they would say to each other. Something relative to himself might be dropped, which would indicate to him whether he might hope or not.

"Don't cry out—it is I—Rab Rainbow," said he. "Let none know that we are together, and none hear what we have to say to each other."

"What have we to say to each other, Rab? You must not tease me—I gave you your answer."

"Queenie! I have become another man, all to please you. It is in your power to make of me a saint or a devil. And now—now—I came with my heart full of goodness. But all has turned bitter as gall. Look here, Queen of Love! Whilst I have been among the evergreens, beside me was a yew tree, and the yew tree bore, as its fruit red, fleshy cups, and in each cup a grain. The cup is meat, the grain is poison. As I waited for you, I ate the red cups that I picked. Now I could swaller the grains—it would be as well so—I should die. I would do it, but that I cannot leave you here, with none to protect you from him—from yourself."

"What do you mean? You frighten me, Rab. I do not wish to be caught here speaking with you."

"Yet you came here to speak with him. Queenie! be pitiful, be tender-hearted towards me! I am a poor chap, but honest—honest now. These hands do no wrong to nobody. I'm sober now; I have touched nothing save water since I saw you last. Do not fear for me. Do not suppose I have been sober only because I have been in the forest, away from public-houses, out of temptation. No, Queenie, not so! I have gone to a tavern. I have sat with the rest, with my own old comrades, and have drunk nothin', not a drop. I did it on purpose to show my old chums that I was changed. I did it to prove my own self—I can stand. I have a resolute will. What I mean to do, that I can do. Queenie, I cannot force you to take me, but I cannot live without you. Drive me away, and I shall do somethin' desperate. I feel it in my heart, in my brain, in my blood. I forewarn you, Queenie, that you are in danger. This cannot, must not, go on. As I came from my cabin, my bosom was full of gratitude, of love for Andrew Grice. I came to Saltwich, I went to his house to take him by both hands and tell him what was in my heart. And here—as I stood among the evergreens—what did I overhear?"

"What did you hear?"

"I heard more than the words spoken. I never

could have supposed him — the serious Andrew— so great a rascal. He marries one girl but loves another. Are you blind, Queenie, or are you bad at heart ? "

He grasped her by both her wrists. He held her so tight that she cried out with pain. His face, his plain, uncouth face, was changed in the moonlight to something terrible and majestic.

" Rab—do let me go. You need not grasp me so tight. I will not run away, I will speak to you."

Then he let go his hold, and folded his arms over his bosom, sank his chin on his breast and looked at her intently from below his heavy brows.

" Rab, I have thanked you for saving my life. I have felt very grateful to you. But now I think it would have been better had you let the creamies trample on me, had you let me go down into that rent in the earth. Had I died then, when my dear father died, I would not have known the care, the misery that I now feel. Rab ! I am at home nowhere. Your mother was kind, but I could not make her house my home. I was not at home at Alma Terrace. I am, least of all, at home here with the Buttons. What will happen I do not know. I look forward to the future with fear and with deadness of brain."

" Queen of Love, you must forget Andrew. Put him out of your head and heart."

She was silent—she bowed her beautiful head. Rab knew that she was crying. He did not speak. He was sure that, as soon as she had acquired sufficient strength, she would speak.

Bats whirled about their heads in the night air.

After full five minutes, Queenie looked up and looked into Rab's eyes.

"I cannot forget Andrew. I cannot put him out of my mind."

"Do you know what you are saying?"

"Rab, forget me—put me out of your heart."

"I cannot do it."

"Nor can I forget Andrew and put him away. I cannot help myself. I love Andrew. I know that he is going to be married to another. I shall have to see it all. I shall be in the house. I know more than do you. I know that he cannot love Ada. When she is his wife, then he will learn what she is, and that it is not in his power to love her. Then I know his heart will speak out and it will return to me. And I shall see his misery. I shall see how he is tortured by that woman, how he will writhe and suffer. And I shall pity him as I love him. What will come of it all, God only knows. What is in store for him—for me—what untold wretchedness—I seem to see and shrink back; and oh, Rab, I wish you had let me die!"

Rab stood as one turned to stone. His head sank lower on his breast.

"Queen! Was it to hear this from you that I came from the forest?—this—this!"

She burst into tears.

"Do not cry. I cannot bear to hear you," said he. "When you were at your father's funeral, every time you wept I sobbed in my heart." He put forth his finger and touched—stroked—her hair that was silvered in the moonlight. "Queenie, I cannot bear it!"

She controlled her emotion, looked up at him through her tears, and said, in a choking voice,—

"You are good indeed, Rab. You have been so kind, so very kind to me. I would not pain you if I could help it. I would love you if I could. Indeed, Rab, I would. If things had been different—if I had never been taken to Alma Terrace—I might have learned to love you as I came to respect you. I see that there is far more in you than I thought at first. But you see how it is with me. I cannot help myself. I know that I have no right to think of Andrew, but think of him I do. I know that when he is here, and I see him every day, I shall be unable to drive from me the love and sorrow, the regret I shall feel for him. I have nowhere else to go. I must stay here, and yet it will be anguish to me to stay, and—oh, Rab, I do not know what it will all end in!"

"Leave the place. Come to me."

"I cannot do that, Rab."

"Then go to my sister."

"I must be where Mr Grice places me. I am his ward. He had put me here, and here I must remain. Of one thing I am glad—he is coming to this house. He will be some check on her. He will be my refuge. If I can bear my pain no longer I will tell him all, and he will send me elsewhere."

"My sister's house is open to you. She is a good woman."

"If I must leave, I will think of this. But I will watch myself. I will fight with myself. I will be as much out of his way as I can. I will work hard so as to have no time for thought."

He was breathing heavily. He trembled as he stood before her in the moonlight.

"I know what I owe to you, Rab, and I wish with all my heart that I could love you. I will try my best. I will strive with my heart, and endeavour to turn it to you. When my thoughts go to Andrew, who has done nothing for me, I will give them a twist and make them look to you to whom I owe my life. I must not think of Andrew. And he must not think of me. I know all that. I know it too well. But I will try to care for you. I will indeed, Rab. It will be my only chance of escape from what threatens."

"Thank you, thank you, Queen of Love!" said the young man, and again he clasped her hands.

Then timidly, hesitatingly, he stooped and kissed

her head, her golden hair; then let her go. He was happy. She had promised. He knew that she would strive against a passion that was sinful, and he trusted that out of this struggle would spring up a pure, deep love for himself. So he went along his way, in the sweet moonlight, looking up into the grey-blue sky; and he could ill restrain himself from shouting as he walked through Saltwich. When he found himself in the forest, he sang for joy.

CHAPTER X.

SHUT OUT.

ADA BUTTON remained a few minutes only in the house after Andrew left. She went in quest of Queenie, and could find her neither in the kitchen, nor in the laundry, nor in her own room.

Convinced that the girl had gone out so as to have some conversation with Andrew, Ada stole forth into the garden to catch her with him, or to listen to what passed between them. She was too late to find her with Andrew, but she overheard a portion of what passed between her and Rab Rainbow, whom she did not know. Unhappily, Ada had caught precisely that which it would have been well that she had missed. She had learned how Queenie regarded Andrew. The tone in which Andrew had greeted the girl had aroused jealousy in her mind, along with the suspicion that he was much more really attached to her than he was to herself, who was to become his wife.

How Queenie regarded her personally was to Ada a matter of indifference; the way in which Queenie had spoken of her left little doubt in her mind that she had not gained the regard of the circus girl.

If Ada Button was not passionate in her attachments, she was strong in her resentments. She was like a flint which would flash out with sparks when struck, but which contained no fire in itself, no warmth when not smitten.

Ada was not the person to hesitate what steps to take on an occasion affecting herself. She returned to the house with her thin lips closed, her heart contracted, and with relentless resolve already formed in her brain.

After Rab had gone, the little Queen remained for a few minutes alone, musing, standing in the moonlight, in the midst of the drive, with her back turned to the gate, and the shadow that she cast lying short on the gravel before her.

A night bird cried out in the bushes. An owl snored like a sleeping man. As she gradually disentangled her senses from the thoughts that engrossed them, Queenie became conscious of this strange sound. She was no country girl, familiar with, and aware of the meaning of, the various notes and noises that break the stillness of night. The sound alarmed her. It was so thoroughly that of the long-drawn breath of a heavy sleeper. Where was the man who snored?

Was he in the evergreens? Or was the man, whose breath she heard, really asleep? There are waking as well as sleeping snorers.

Queenie began to feel uneasy. A chill crept down her back. Her heart fluttered in her bosom like an imprisoned butterfly, and she hastened to the house, treading cautiously lest she should arouse the attention of the snorer. She went round to the back yard and tried the kitchen door. It was fast. She tapped lightly at it, waited, listened, and heard no step approach in response to her knock. She put her ear to the keyhole and heard the loud tick-tack of the clock. She could hear nothing else. She then went to the window and pattered at the glass with her finger-tips, and then discovered that there was no light in the kitchen; the lamp was out, the fire in the grate extinguished, or banked up for the night. Feeling alarmed, she now went round to the front entrance, and gently turned the handle of the door. That was also fast. The house was locked up for the night.

Surprised, disconcerted, Queenie returned to the back yard; although the household had retired, yet all were not asleep. There was a light in the servant's bedroom. She could see the glow of the lamp through the blind.

The girl picked up some gravel and threw it at the window-panes. Then she saw a shadow against the

blind, and a hand draw the linen aside for a moment. She again cast a handful of sand.

Cautiously the blind was drawn aside, and a girl's head appeared. The casement was partly opened, and the servant put forth her head, and said in a whisper, so as to be audible in the yard,—

"It is *her* doing. She ordered me upstairs. Wait a bit. I'll throw you your shawl."

The blind fell, and the shadow disappeared. Presently the blind was again drawn, and again the girl appeared. She thrust forth an arm and dropped a woollen wrap at the feet of Queenie, then hastily closed the casement and withdrew from the window.

The night was cold. There was frost in the air. It was damp, as is usual in autumn. The chill had affected Queenie, and she was shivering. Grateful for the shawl, she threw it over her head and shoulders. What was to be done? There had been a stove alight all day in the laundry for keeping the irons hot. If the door was unfastened, Queenie might creep in there, and pass the night in tolerable comfort. She went to the laundry and tried the handle. The door was fastened. Even the coal-shed was fast with chain and padlock.

There was no help for it—she must rouse the house.

Accordingly, Queenie went round once more to the front and looked up. There was a light in Mr

Button's window on the left. The window on the right was dark, but that belonged to the best bedroom. She stepped round the further corner. The second window on the east side was that of Ada's room. The curtains were drawn, so was the blind, but there was a light in the chamber. Satisfied that the master and mistress of the house were up, Queenie pulled the front door bell, and rapped with the knocker. The bell was timidly drawn, and the rap given nervously and apologetically. Then she waited, trembling with cold and apprehension.

No answer was accorded to her summons. She panted, shivered, clung to the door and listened. Then she knocked again, louder.

Cautiously the window-sash of the bedroom on the left was thrust up, and Mr Button's head appeared. He leaned forward and said,—

"It is *her* order. Very sorry. Here's half-a-crown. Get a lodging elsewhere."

And a coin chinked on the doorstep and rolled off on to the gravel.

"Mr Button! why am I shut out?"

Down went the sash; she received no reply.

What course should she take? Queenie wrapped the shawl tighter about her and seated herself on the step, with her back to the jamb, leaning her shoulder and head against the door. She would remain there till, in very shame, the Buttons let her in. They

could not intend to exclude her altogether. Ada may have found that she was out of the house when she gave orders that the doors should be fastened for the night, and have been annoyed, and was now giving her a lesson. But she would surely admit her presently.

Queenie must wait patiently, and endure the exposure till Ada relented. Accordingly, she remained seated, the cold entering her bones, and in the stillness heard the snoring owl again.

There certainly must be some one secreted in the shrubs. How cold he must be! Was he a tramp? Would he live through the night, lying out in the dews and frost? Perhaps the man was ill, was dying; she had heard it told that dying men breathed hard, stertorously. If so, the snore would presently cease when the spirit fled. Then among the bushes next day a dead man would be found. She must not suffer the poor wretch to lie there exposed to die. She must entreat that he should be admitted, even if she herself were excluded.

She sprang to her feet, and loudly, almost imperiously, rapped with the knocker, and pulled the bell. Then she held her breath and hearkened.

Was that a step she heard descending the stair? A little strip of orange light was visible beneath the door. Through a knot in the wood an arrow of fire shot, struck her and disappeared. Then she heard

the sound of a chain being undone, next of a bolt being withdrawn.

Queenie stood back deferentially as Ada Button opened the door and came forth, holding the carriage whip in her right hand. With the left on the handle she drew the door behind her into its place, and closed without shutting it. The moon was full on Ada, painting a black shadow behind her, turning her face to Carrara marble, and glistening in her eyes like crystals. She was tall and slender, finely proportioned; and with her dark hair about the head, and the inky shadow on the door, she looked like a Diana of half-animated marble.

For some while she gazed steadily at the shivering girl, whose eyes were overflowing and her bosom heaving. Then suddenly she raised her hand, and with the butt end of the whip struck her on the cheek and said,—

"I have owed you this—now I have repaid the debt!"

Queenie, staggering back under the weight and sting of the blow, uttered a cry and clasped her hands to her face.

Ada reversed the whip in her hand, and said between her teeth, that gleamed in the moonlight,—

"Come to the door again, disturb the house once more, and I will beat you, beat you, beat you as a dog!"

Then the sash of the bedroom window was raised and again Mr Button looked forth and said,—

"Never mind, my girl. It is her way. We all have our backs broken in this establishment. It is your turn now; it has been mine. Here is another half-crown."

Again down went the sash as a coin tinkled on the gravel.

Ada remained immovable in the doorway, holding the whip, and looking at the sobbing girl without a muscle in her cold face moving, without a tremor in the eyelid, any relaxation in the set lips.

Presently, with the lash, she struck at the coins that shone in the moonlight on the dark red sandstone gravel, and said,—

"Take these and begone! Send here to-morrow for your box. Send—do not come for it. Never set your foot here again! Never in future appear before my face. Go—go where you will! Go to Andrew, if you list—what care I?—or to your other lover. It is all one to me. Go—let me be rid of you; that is all I desire. Go! In the field is a pit; cast yourself in and be lost for ever! It is all one to me what becomes of the circus girl. What care I?"

She put up the whip to her lips, bit the lash, spat it out, laughed,—

"Father's cow went down there alive—into the heart of the earth. Go there too! Go—still your sobs

there. Cease your weeping there. Forget your Andrew there. Forget that other lover! Go! What care I?"

She went back through the door, facing Queenie still, and the black shadow of the lintel fell over and eclipsed first her glittering eyes, then her cold cheeks, then her frozen lips.

She slammed the door, thrust the bolt in place, put up the chain. The strip of orange light under the door disappeared; once more through the knot shot the fiery dart—as a stab into the night aimed at the outcast—and her feet slowly ascended the stairs as she sought her chamber, her warm bed and downy pillow.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RANGER'S LODGE.

In her trouble, pain, bewilderment, Queenie no longer heard, thought of, feared the snoring in the bush. She ran down the drive and out at the gate, holding her bruised cheek. It was not till she was in the road that she found that a decision of some sort must be made as to whither she should go.

White before her, in the moonlight, lay the old Roman road—the Wattling street—stretching away to Chester on one hand, and to Manchester on the other. Of the cities that lay on the right hand and on the left, of the direction taken by that ancient way, Queenie knew nothing, or, to be more exact, her knowledge was limited to the fact that if she turned to the left she would come to Saltwich, if to the right she would enter the vast solitude of Delamere Forest.

Through that forest she had travelled, with the caravan of horses and circus vehicles, on her coming to Saltwich with her dear father. Then the long

tracts of pines and oak, of heather and sand, had interested her. And she had been told by the maid, Jemima, that, outside the gate of the Button's, lay the road that led, on the right, into that waste and solemn region.

Now, as she stood in the highway, looking up and down it—uncertain what to do, where to go—she saw the forest, like a mass of ink-stain under the moon on one side, so dark that no rays of the orb of light could illuminate it, and she recoiled from the thought of losing herself in a wilderness where were no habitations, and which, for aught she knew to the contrary, might be haunted by savage beasts. Her education had been neglected in the horsemanship. She had not been taught that the last wolves were exterminated under Edgar the Saxon. There might be worse than savage beasts in the forest—wandering spectres, white, filmy, that froze the heart with the mere look of their lantern eyes; worse than spectres —wild and lawless men. Therefore Queenie turned her face in the direction of Saltwich.

To the house of the Grices she could not go. She shrank from again meeting Andrew. There was no alternative before her save a return to Mrs Rainbow, in Heathendom.

Accordingly, she took her way thither, with the shawl drawn well over her face, that she might not be recognised. The hour was not late. At the Button's,

the house was not wont to be closed so early. She was confident that Mrs Rainbow would be engaged on some work or other at that time; for usually, when others became heavy with sleep, a spell of activity took hold of this woman, and engaged her in making a rummage and a noise till past midnight.

It was so on this occasion. Mrs Rainbow was going to have her chimney swept on the following morning. Therefore she was occupied turning over mats, covering tables, veiling her rack of crockery and her bottles of sweets, and putting her stores of oranges in drawers. The oranges at this time of the year were very hard, pale in colour, and sour. They would prove even less attractive if covered with a powdering of soot. As for the gingerbeer bottles, Mrs Rainbow let them stand where they were. The season for gingerbeer was over; a little more dirt on them would not signify. Moreover, the bottles were brown, and not calculated to show the soot, like the pale skins of the oranges.

When Queenie tapped at the door, Mrs Rainbow threw it open. She had tied up her head in a pictorial kerchief, on which were represented the uniforms of the British Army, in lively colours. It was knotted at the corners, forming horns. Her gown was tucked up under the string of her apron, and the apron tucked up with it, exhibiting a rather short petticoat, very dirty and ragged, and below that a pair of col-

lossal legs in black stockings, with holes in them, shod in slippers burst at the sides, and down at heel.

At the fire, cowering before the operations of making ready for the sweep, was Seth White, the circus boy, who had been reared by Signor Santi.

"Thunder in my bones!" exclaimed Mrs Rainbow. "Whom have we here? Not the little Queen of Love again? Surely, never!"

"It is I," answered the girl. "I have been driven away from the Button's as I was driven out from the Grices. I do not suit in such houses. I was never brought up to their ways."

"But, curdle my wig!" said Mrs Rainbow. "Come in and let us look at you! What is the matter with your face? You have had a blow on your cheek."

"I ran against something; my eyes were full of tears. I could not see."

"I believe you've been struck—I do! Shiver my chignon! I believe you have. Who did that? If Rab knew, he'd kill the fellow."

"Never mind about that, dear Mrs Rainbow," said Queenie. "Can you shelter me for the night?"

"To be sure I can. There is the room you had before. Rab is away, trying to live respectable. Hope he likes it. But it ain't in him. I expect him every night to come tumbling in, broken out roaring drunk. But I sha'n't shelter him no more. I've took in Seth here as a lodger, and let him have Rab's room; so if

Rab does turn up, I'll put him in the fowl-house where he'll get bitten with fleas, and serve him right for getting fresh."

"Queenie," said Seth, coming forward, his face shining with pleasure, "it is a joy to see you. Here have I been a-tryin' to get work and can't find none—and in a day or two I was goin' off to seek some show in which I could earn my bread."

"Seth," said the girl, "I am sure you will do something for me!"

"Anything," he answered readily.

"Then you will go to-morrow to Button's for my box. And if you hear of a show, where they want a little girl who can ride, and who is getting on to dance on the tight-rope, write and tell me, and I will come at once. I am fit for nothing else, suited to be among no other people but show folk and vagabonds."

On the morrow Queenie left Mrs Rainbow, much to the disappointment of that good woman. But Queenie had made up her mind to try whether she could live in peace with the Gerards, as Rab had proposed. What Rab had said of his sister pleased the girl. She would not allow her box to be taken to their house, till she had herself seen Mrs Gerard, and obtained leave from her to shelter in her house.

From Mrs Rainbow she received instructions as to her way, and she set out alone to find the cottage of the ranger.

The instructions had been somewhat diffuse, nevertheless Queenie started, animated by hope and rendered confident by the assurance, often repeated, that it was not possible for her to lose her way. Queenie did not, however, find it as easy to discover the cottage of the Gerards as she had been led to anticipate. In fact, it lay off the high road, down one of the lanes cut through the forest. It was an old house of the Cheshire type, built when oak was abundant, and the oaks were of centuries of growth. It was large, rambling, of many gables, a structure of black oak and plaster between the beams. The porch protruded, and had seats in it; and there were projecting windows of many sides. The whole was roofed over with russet tiles the colour of beech leaves when turned by frost. Before the house—it could not be designated a cottage—was a garden, with tall hollyhocks of many colours—spires of rich colour against the broken walls. The frost had nipped the leaves, but the flowers were as yet uncut.

As Queenie approached the house, much of the doubt as to the welcome that would be extended to her faded away. There are houses that repel, others that invite, some that throw out their arms and smile on the visitor, that seem to say, "Come and nestle into my lap, and lay your head on my breast and be cosy." It was so with this ancient timber and plaster building. The soft tones of the roof, splashed with yellow

lichen, the pale blue smoke wreathing from the brick chimney, against a background of Scotch pines, the laughing garden, the wide porch, the twinkling windows, like eyes full of happiness and goodwill, spoke of hospitality and love to the fluttering heart of the lonely child, and drew her on, as had not the cottage in Heathendom, nor No. 4 Alma Terrace, least of all the box-like mansion of the Button's.

Queenie passed through the porch and the open oak house-door, and tapped at that leading into the hall or kitchen.

Almost before she had lowered her hand, the door was flung open, and in it stood a bright, pretty, smiling woman, in a lavender cotton dress, with white apron, her sleeves rolled back, and her fresh, rounded bare arms extended.

"I knew you would come! I was sure it would be so!" she said. "Rab told me to expect you, some day; and when I heard you were at the Button's, then I knew the *some* day must be soon. I knew you at once when I saw you coming through the garden. I was at the circus that night when it came down like a house of cards. Richard never let go my arm —Richard is my husband—and he dragged me out. *He* never lost presence of mind. Never saw such a man for coolness. It is always so with him. He knows at once what is to be done, and where to go. I said, as soon as I saw the sun shining on your pretty

hair—just like stonecrop—I said—'There that little dear comes!'"

What a kitchen! How clean, how beautiful, how comfortable! A wide hearth with a fire of wood smouldering on it; above, on the mantleshelf, polished brass candlesticks and canisters scrubbed with sand—in cleaning, the hand had been twisted till the canisters were covered with a pattern as of frost-flowers. A rack of guns surmounted all. The walls were panelled with black oak, and above the panelling were stag skulls and antlers. Queenie looked round in wonder. She had never seen anything like this.

"'Tis an old-fashioned place," said Mrs Gerard. "Folks do say it was once a royal hunting lodge, but I'm no scholar, I don't know; now it's a keeper's cottage. Such is the way of things. What was good enough for kings at one time, passed on to gentlefolks in the next generation, then it wouldn't do for any but farmers. Next generation the farmers was too grand for such, and so it came to be handed on to labouring people. Well, we're comfortable enough in it. Next generation I won't say but that tramps 'll turn up their noses at it, and say—'We can't stand a place, even for a night's lodging, that hasn't got hot water laid on, and not even a bagatelle board pervided.'"

Martha Gerard had inherited her mother's love of talking, and also her good looks. Poor Rab's features

were the family rummage-heap of all that was plain and shapeless. He had some of the slatternliness of his mother; Martha her energy. Unlike her mother, Mrs Gerard turned her energies to good account. The house within was in perfect order; every metal article sparkled with cleanness, and the linen and drapery were without spot or tear.

"Did Rab really say I was coming?" asked Queenie, bewildered, her heart swelling, her eyes filling, her lips quivering with feeling at the kindliness of her reception.

"My dear, when he said you were at the Button's it was enough. I was there once—in service. I remained one month, and then Richard fetched me away. He saw I was getting bad. I could not have stood it longer. The old gentleman's harmless—he has his ways, but they did not concern me—but Miss Ada—she has a rare way of breaking folk's backs—as the old gentleman calls it. I doubt if there is another like her. It's a gift or a misfortune." Mrs Gerard went to a flower in the window and began to pick off the withered leaves. "There, I will say no more; I cannot tell how to stay my tongue when her name comes up. Sit down, dear, and welcome."

"How good you are to me!"

"Not at all. It is I who am in debt to you. Poor Rab! he was going to pieces altogether, and somehow, since he had known you he has been an altered man.

He was the despair of his mother and a distress to his sister. He got among bad companions, got into bad ways, and he was falling into much such a wreck as did your circus. But there always were threads of good in Rab. You laid hold of them and have drawn him out of evil. He saved your life when you were enveloped in ruin, and you have saved what is better than life in poor Rab. Go on and finish what you've begun in him, and I will do anything for you—kiss your feet and be your grateful servant. There—come—this is your home now, and here—come to my arms and let me be mother and sister to you, my little wandering Queen of Love!"

CHAPTER XII

ANATHEMA!

THE marriage had taken place.

It had taken place in the most ordinary, undemonstrative manner possible. Even the bells of Scatterley were not pealed; but for that there was good reason, as the announcement as to when the wedding would take place had not been made to the ringers.

Jabez Grice, who ruled everybody and directed everything, ruled and directed that so it was to be. Why all the pomp and circumstance of hymen? The marriage was a matter of business, and let it be conducted in business-like fashion. He would have desired the ceremony to have taken place at Little Bethel, but to this the Buttons objected. A matter of business the wedding was, for it was a principal item in the compact between Tom Button and Jabez Grice.

Already, for three weeks, workmen had been engaged on the ground, within a bow-shot of the house. They had sunk a shaft through the usual boulder clay, red marl and gypsum. They had broken through the "flag," and at once the brine, hissing, had rushed up the shaft.

The walls of the sheds were rising—they were of boards on a basement of brick—and the roofs were being got ready. The structure was not solid—it might be said to be flimsy—but it sufficed for the end in view. A salt-boiling factory does not require very substantial buildings; and in this case, expedition in getting to work was the main consideration. The foundations of the chimney were laid. As the farm of the Button's was at a sufficient distance from Saltwich, no necessity existed for carrying the chimney to an extraordinary height. The smoke might blight the evergreens in the drive kill some of the hedge trees, but would incommode nobody save the Buttons. As soon as the shaft had been begun, Jabez Grice had thrown up his situation at Brundrith's, and his son had necessarily seceded with him. This was a declaration of war that astonished and alarmed Brundrith.

The management of the works, the control of the men, the threads of the business, had been placed unreservedly in the hands of Grice, whom the proprietor had trusted as a faithful servant—almost as

a friend. Now, suddenly, Brundrith was bereft of his services, and found this confidant, with all the intricacies of the concern at his fingers' ends, converted into a foe, or, at least, a rival.

There was, at the moment, no one capable of supplying his place; now, when too late, Brundrith regretted that he had not sufficiently considered the value of Grice's services, and had not dealt more liberally with him, given him some share, if but a small one, in the profits. Of course, it is an allowed maxim that every man must do the best he can for himself; and Brundrith felt that he was not wholly free from blame in the matter, yet he entertained considerable resentment at the suddenness and completeness with which he was menaced with a rival business, and one that robbed him of his almost indispensable man.

Jabez Grice, Tom Button and John Nottershaw had calculated on the effect of their surprise sprung on Brundrith, and for this reason had kept their counsel, not letting their intention transpire till all was ripe for execution.

When they had resolved on beginning operations, not a moment was lost in taking them in hand with energy. The energy and promptness that marked their undertaking were due to Grice. He was aware of the annoyance caused to his late employer, and though he was a man of no fine feelings and delicate scruple, he somewhat shrank from taking a lead in

the concern. It sufficed him to be the main-spring behind the other two, who were put forward as the ostensible organisers of the Company, and speculators in it. Grice had not been for thirty years with Brundrith, without being well aware in what manner to undermine his prosperity, to pluck to himself some of the custom, and to entice away all the best workmen.

Now it was that the influence of Grice over men became conspicuous. The hands at Brundrith's were ready to follow him to the new factory. Love of change did not explain this tendency to secession. It was due to the commanding force of Grice's character and manner. The men did not love him, but they believed in him. They trusted his judgment; they lost confidence when Grice had withdrawn. Extravagant expectations of success were raised by his giving his adhesion to the new Company.

The confederates had everything ready for beginning and carrying out their scheme with expedition. The land was Button's. Grice sold out the securities of which he was trustee for Queenie, but took care to have a mortgage executed on the land to the full amount before he would embark any money in the concern. Nottershaw had at the time no contract in hand; he had an army of masons, bricklayers, carpenters, waiting to be engaged, and in his yard was any amount of the material required.

Accordingly, the execution of the plan was carried out with celerity. The shaft was proceeded with night and day, till the brine-run was tapped, then the pump, ready at hand, was adapted to the bore. A reservoir was excavated and lined with brick to receive the brine pumped up. Pipes of communication were laid, connecting the reservoir with the wych-houses. The pans were riveted together and set on the hypocausts, and the flues were carried under the stove house.

During the day Grice never left the works, and he kept Andrew in constant employment as deputy overlooker. Other arrangements of a private nature had been made, but with these Nottershaw had nothing to do. Though they concerned the young people to a large extent, they were not taken into consultation; all was determined for them between Grice and Button. The latter was to leave the farm on the day of the wedding. He had never taken cordially to agricultural life. It would be hard to say to what he would take with sympathy if not enthusiasm. He was tired of farming, glad to remove from proximity to the stable and cowhouse; and temporarily, till his future residence was determined on, till the affairs of the Company were placed on a solid foundation, he would move into No. 4 Alma Terrace, where Aunt Beulah would see to his comforts.

Miss Grice was not desirous of moving from her

old quarters. Button's was too far from chapel, from her Dorcas and missionary meetings, which were the satisfaction of her soul. Moreover, she did not cordially like Ada. There was something in the girl that repelled Beulah; she herself could not say what this was, but she was conscious of entertaining a doubt whether she would be able to get on happily with Andrew's wife under one roof. Mr Button professed that nothing would suit him better than to spend the rest of his days in Alma Terrace, and lay his bones in Saltwich. When he declared this, and insisted on it, Ada curled her lip, and said in his presence,—

"Father is scheming to leave the place; you must always read him by contraries."

Grice was indifferent where Tom Button went after that his presence was no longer required, till Brundrith had been brought to terms, or the new Company had started in permanent opposition. Button was at first needed, as he was to be the ostensible head of the concern, and the negotiations with Brundrith were to be carried on through him.

Button knew nothing of salt-making, nothing of the construction of a factory; he was, therefore, of no use on the spot, whereas Grice had to be there daily, hourly, and much time was consumed by his travelling to and fro between Alma Terrace and the works.

The fact that he was required on the scene of operations necessitated his taking up his abode with his son and daughter-in-law. It may be said that although these matters were arranged between the fathers, yet necessity, or circumstance, had compelled them to the arrangement.

The wedding had taken place.

There was to be no honeymoon excursion to the Isle of Man, the Lakes, or to Jericho. Of what use would such an excursion be? What pleasure could it afford in the fall of the year? It would be throwing good money away, and squandering more precious time. Andrew was wanted at the works, and the utmost holiday that could be accorded him was the day of his marriage. Ada raised no objections; she seemed as indifferent to the advantages of a honeymoon as was "Hammer" Grice. So long as she secured Andrew as a husband—young, good-looking, amiable—that was all she desired. It was no secret to any who knew the Buttons—except the Grices, those most interested—that Ada Button had not been successful in love affairs, had, in fact, been fought shy of by the marriageable young men.

There was no wedding-breakfast, no bride-cake, no health-drinking, no speech-making. As already said, no marriage bells rang out. No flowers were strewn no rice cast, and it was hardly possible to throw a shoe after a bride who did not leave her home.

Into the recondite question whether a trousseau was obtained for Ada, the writer is unable to enter, but he can aver that no expense was incurred by Andrew, or for Andrew, in the matter of dress.

"You have the suit ordered for Sant's funeral—that will do admirably to be married in. You have four day shirts, six pocket-handkerchiefs, eight socks and a box of paper collars. That will suffice."

The *dictum* was that of his father, and it settled the matter of Andrew's clothing. The same coach and the same driver that we saw conducting a deputation to Button's, and again engaged for a funeral, now conveyed the wedding party to the home of the young people.

No sooner was Andrew in the house, arrived from the ceremony at Scatterley Church, than he looked eagerly about him, and asked,—

"Where is Queenie? She should be here to congratulate us. I have not seen her for an age."

"Nor are likely to see her for another," said Ada. "She is gone."

"Gone!" repeated Andrew, starting and staring at his wife with dismay in his open blue eyes.

"Gone these three weeks," replied Ada, indifferently.

"Gone—where to?"

"How am I to know?"

"But—good gracious! Queenie gone! and you do not know where she is!"

"I do not know—I have made no inquiries."

"Then you should have done so."

"Of course I am in the wrong. No sooner are we married than you find fault with me."

"But this is frightful. When did she go?"

"Are you deaf or stupid? I have already said, three weeks ago."

"Queenie gone!"

"She took herself off with a play-actor or mountebank—I do not understand distinctions among that class of people."

"But—does my father—"

At that moment Jabez Grice entered the room.

"Father!" said Andrew, in great excitement and agitation, "Ada says that Queenie has gone—has run away."

"Why was I not told?" asked Mr Grice. "When did this happen? Give me all particulars and I will have her recovered."

"It is too late," said Ada. "There was some fellow loafing about the place at night, and Queenie continually out talking with him. It was a scandal to a respectable house like ours, and I really was relieved when she ran away with him."

"I don't believe it! I cannot believe it!" exclaimed Andrew, pacing the room.

"So—you give me the lie with almost the first words you use in the house after our marriage!" said Ada bitterly.

"But what grounds have you—"

"I will not answer your catechism," retorted Ada.

"But I insist on knowing; you will answer me," said Jabez. "I am her guardian, and know I must, and I will."

"I will tell you," replied the young wife, "but not Andrew, who asserts that I am a liar, and bids me prove my words." She turned her head and looked at her husband, and her thin lips were drawn. "After this sort of scandalous proceeding had been going on for some time, she eloped with the fellow one night, and sent next morning for her box by this man, who told our maid he had been one of the company in the circus."

"She cannot be far off," said Andrew, in the greatest distress. "Oh, father! what is to be done?"

"I will make inquiries at once," replied Grice. "If it be as I anticipate, and the sow that might have been, but was not, washed, has returned to her wallowing in the mire, then nothing can be done for her. Not one penny of what her father left shall she have. The man—the only man with whom she could have gone—was Seth White, for he alone of the troupe of tumblers and buffoons remained in

Saltwich. If I ascertain that he disappeared at the same time that she did, then—" For a while "Hammer" clenched his teeth, and his face assumed a hard expression. "Then," he continued after a while, "then I shall withhold what is placed in my trust. Queenie must show that she deserves to have it—prove it to my satisfaction—before I give her one penny. My conscience will not suffer me to surrender what I know would be spent in debauchery, in every kind of vicious and riotous living. Andrew, I shall make inquiries at once. If what Ada says proves to be the case—and I do not doubt for one moment that it will do so—then I insist that this miserable, depraved girl's name be never mentioned again between us. Let her be to us as one that is dead, nay, as one who never has been. Let her be to the church in this serious household, Anathema Maranatha, Amen!"

CHAPTER XIII

UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE

QUEENIE'S joyous nature, that had been beaten down at Alma Terrace and the Buttons, recovered its elasticity at the Ranger's Lodge. Her happy spirit, that had drooped as a flower buffeted by winds and battered by rain, rose buoyant in the sunny atmosphere at the Gerards.

There are homes in which reigns perpetual spring, in which the sun always shines, and the May breezes ever waft. Such was the house of the Gerards.

Dick Gerard and his wife, Martha, were ever cheerful. They were God-fearing, humble folk, making no pretence to be serious, not setting themselves up to be models, and condemning to outer darkness all such as did not regard them as patterns, and conform to their mould and imitate their example. The birds of the air, the beasts of the

field, the fluttering insects in the sunbeam are happy, and follow the law of their nature without self-consciousness and trumpeting their orderliness, and the Gerards led an innocent, joyous life in their pleasant cottage, and were unaware that there was anything extraordinary and imitable in their mode of life, in their manner of enduring the sorrows, and gathering in the gladness, that fell to their share.

A ranger's life is certainly not one of great hardship, but it has its dangers, and a keeper's wife may enjoy the happiness of having a healthy-minded and hale-bodied husband, but she has also her cares when the poachers are about, and at intervals they travel in gangs and give notice beforehand that, if the keepers attempt to obstruct them, they will do it at their peril. But, whatever the difficulties and dangers that were before them, the Gerards looked forward with quiet trust, and with light hearts bred of trust. If a dyke ran across their course, they leaped it, hand in hand, with a laugh.

It was wonderful how much they had to talk about when together. There was always something to tell, some question to be asked, some proceeding to be discussed, often some little joke to be bandied about from one to the other. And how they laughed over trifles—like children. There was, of

course, some domestic strife, caused by one endeavouring to overreach the other—she by smuggling into his plate some choice piece of food that had been put on hers, he by surreptitiously doing some of her more arduous bits of work when she was otherwise engaged.

The ranger and his wife had a child, a daughter of twelve, who was paralysed in her lower limbs. She had met with an accident—a chill—and had never recovered the use of her feet. She sat all day in a little rush arm-chair, sometimes by the fire, sometimes in the sun. Her mother talked to her whilst engaged on her work, and it was possible that the habit of incessantly talking which Martha Gerard possessed, if inherited as a faculty from her mother, had been largely developed by the necessity she felt of amusing the child—of preventing her from feeling her infirmity.

The little girl, Jessie, required a good deal of attention; she had to be ministered to as a babe in arms, though she was handy with her fingers and could knit stockings and darn rents, plait straw and weave osiers. At times she suffered much rheumatic pain in her joints, but, nevertheless, the drawn, white face was ever cheerful, and the child looked forward into a future that could never be one of soundness, into life that could be nothing but a painful existence, without a murmur, even with a smile.

What a contrast this house presented to those in which Queenie had been sheltered hitherto! There was none of the grumbling, fault-finding fussiness of Mrs Rainbow, none of the disorder of tidying that was perpetual in her habitation. There was none of the repression of animal spirits and cultivation of an artificial conscience, that damned what was natural, and blessed what was unreal, such as had been the moral atmosphere of No. 4 Alma Terrace; there was none of the harshness, heartlessness, snapping, rending that she had encountered from Ada at the farm, hidden under a smooth and cold exterior, like a volcano buried in snow.

Here were cheerful innocence, frank cordiality. The Gerards made a pleasure of work, and a holiday of every day of drudgery; for, somehow, they had the wit, whatever they undertook, to discover in it something conducive to happiness, and to find a pleasant, easy way of executing every duty.

It was a wonder to Queenie to hear the sick and suffering child sing to herself at night when she was in pain that precluded sleep. It touched her to the quick to see how her mother fondled the girl, and laughed, and told funny stories to her, whilst her eyes were full of moisture; and to see how the child, in response, though biting her lips to prevent herself from crying out in her spasms, smiled and caressed her mother's cheeks. The father

was, moreover, as devoted to his crippled girl as was the mother, and it was a pretty and pathetic sight on Sundays to watch him as he carried the child lightly in his arms, as though she were no heavier than a dove, to the foresters' parish church in the merry greenwood.

One evening, when the patient was in bed, Queenie ventured on the remark,—

"What a sad thing that Jessie is so infirm."

The ranger looked surprised, thought for a moment, and then said,—

"I don't know! I shouldn't have loved her half so much, nor would her mother have cared for her as she does now. And I doubt if Jessie herself would ha' been so happy."

In such a house, where all seemed so complete in itself, an intruder ran the risk of disturbing its equanimity; but Queenie found that she fitted into her surroundings without an effort, and filled a place as though forming an integral part of the whole. Her own bright nature was in accordance with that of the Gerards, and she felt none of that restlessness, that craving after amusemnet, which had forced her to commit extravagances under the repression to which she had been subjected at the Grices. Yet as Queenie looked back to the time she had been in Alma Terrace, she could not refuse to acknowledge that, notwithstanding the exaggeration

and restraint there, she had learned something, and that a something of immense importance to her—the lesson that she should be ruled by principle, and not be swayed by caprice, should live to fulfil duties—not be the creature of impulse. She had acquired the conviction, mainly through Andrew, that life was not a soap-bubble, to be blown about in irridescent emptiness till it bursts, but a something with definite purpose to guide it, with an object to which to attain, and a course marked out which it must pursue. What she had learned at the Grices as a theory, that she saw put in practice at the Gerards. But she would never, perhaps, have understood what governed the Gerards, had she not been shown the motive-principle at the Grices.

How was it that her mind reverted to Andrew so frequently? Andrew—what was he now to her? What could he be to her for the future? She persuaded herself that the reason why she thought of him so much was because she pitied him greatly for the prospect that lay before him—the prospect of a life of contention—when married to Ada Button, and she pitied him for the estrangement that must ensue when he came to really know her.

Andrew was rushing into this union, without a suspicion as to the real character of the woman to whom he was about to link his life. What there was in Ada that could have induced him to propose,

was a puzzle to Queenie. Ada had indeed a prepossessing exterior, but her manner before strangers was cold and repellent. Only among her familiars and when there was no need for disguise, or when the furious passions in her breast broke forth, did she fling aside this frozen demeanour, and then those who saw her longed for a return to her former frostiness—that at least was tolerable.

Queenie had no right to think so often and so long of Andrew; she knew it, and strove to turn her thoughts to other matters.

She was helped to do this by Rab, who was not long in discovering where she was, and whose delight at finding her with his sister was boundless. He did not venture to press himself on Queenie. He did not speak to her a word about his feelings. He talked about his sister, the crippled niece, about his life as an under-ranger, about what alterations and improvements he was effecting in his cottage.

Often, in the evening, he sat over the fire and smoked with Dick Gerard, and spoke about poachers and game. Rab knew intimately the ways of both. But what a field for observation, what an eternal spring of interest were the forest and the cover! How inexhaustible is the study of animal life, and how full of mysteries it is!

Queenie listened whilst this conversation went on, and it greatly entertained her. Animals she had ever

loved, but the wild animal and its ways were new to her.

When they were alone together, Rab spoke to Queenie of all kinds of matters except of his love. Of that he never spoke. To it he never alluded. Once only, humbly, shyly, he inquired if it were unpleasant to her that he came so often to the Ranger's Cottage. Let her say so and he would stay away.

She could not find it in her heart to tell him that his presence embarrassed her—yet it was so. Martha saw the good influence exerted over her brother by the girl, knew the state of his heart, and would allude to the change wrought in the lawless, headstrong youth, and express her hope that Queenie would continue to control him, and would finally reclaim him altogether.

But the girl could not entertain towards Rab any deeper feeling than regard. If he were content with that, with being treated as a brother, she would give him true fraternal affection. But she knew too surely that what brought him so frequently from his distant cottage was a hope that some day he might win something better than sisterly regard. She often formed the resolution to tell him that his hopes were in vain, but never could muster up the courage to do so; she hinted as much to Martha, but Mrs Gerard was of that sanguine disposition which

disregards things contrary to what is desired, and hopes for what is wished for in spite of every discouragement.

He brought her small presents—a bunch of moss with Jew's ears of brilliant scarlet, a jay's wing, a cluster of cones growing into a ball, a late-blooming blue borrage, hazel nuts. She accepted these little presents. She could not wound him by refusing them. It would seem wanton ingratitude to bid him take them elsewhere.

But these little gifts were a vexation to her. It troubled her that she was so unwilling to receive them.

Why should she not like Rab better than she did Andrew? Andrew belonged to another, and Rab was free. Andrew, after he had known her, had cast himself at the feet of Ada, but Rab had been her faithful, devoted swain since he had rescued her from the fallen circus, and Rab had never had another love.

Why should she dream of Andrew, and not of Rab? Why should Andrew occupy so much her waking thoughts?

Alas! the heart is not under the control of reason. It is wayward and capricious.

CHAPTER XIV.

IMPROVING THE OCCASION.

"I THINK now that we will improve the occasion," said Jabez Grice.

"What occasion?" asked Ada, sharply.

"The marriage—the solemn union of hearts and hands."

"It might be improved with advantage," said the bride. "Certainly with advantage, when Andrew begins by calling me a liar and asking after a common circus girl the moment he sets foot in the house."

"If you will ring the bell and call the servant, I will do my best—"

Ada interrupted.

"She is engaged."

"But it is my wish," said Jabez, peremptorily. "When I say a thing, I mean it to be done." He went to the bell and sounded, then to the door and called down the passage,—"Jemima, bring the lamp."

"Oh! the lamp. I have no objection to that," said Ada with a sneer.

When, however, the servant entered and placed the lighted oil lamp on the table, shut the shutters and drew the curtains, Jabez approached his chair to the table, opened a big book and waited till the operation of excluding the last rays of departing day was over.

Grice watched the girl with somewhat grim face. His son had dutifully drawn up his chair. Then said Grice,—

"Jemima, sit down. I am going to draw out certain serious and edifying considerations from the event that has this day taken place."

Jemima curtseyed and planted herself near the door.

Ada, who had been by the fire, started up, went to the window and withdrew the green kerchief that had been thrown over a canary cage. Then she returned to her seat by the fire.

"What is the meaning of that proceeding?" asked Jabez.

"You will learn presently," answered Ada.

Hardly had Jabez Grice begun to harangue, expound and develop his subject, before the canary, roused by the brilliant light and animated by the strong voice, struck up a tweet-tweet! and then broke into shrill, rapid song. Jabez stopped speaking

and looked indignantly at the bird, thereupon the canary also ceased. No sooner, however, had he recommenced, than the bird also resumed its shrill strain.

"Silence that creature!" ordered Grice.

No one stirred.

The canary rang out its thrilling song, merrily, defiantly.

"I said, 'Silence that bird!'" repeated "Hammer."

"Shall I remove the cage?" asked Andrew.

"Anything for quiet!—strangle it. I cannot hear my own voice."

"I will throw the cover over the cage," said Ada.

"Why did you remove it?" asked Jabez.

"I thought to increase your congregation."

She went to the window, and, with a contemptuous jerk, threw the green kerchief over the cage, but so that it hung down more on one side than on the other. The canary at once ceased to sing. Grice resumed his discourse.

It was his wont, when addressing an audience, whether a small one in a room, or the public in a hall, to look around him and mark the effect of his words on those who listened.

After a while, and a look or two at the maid, he said severely,—

"Jemima! there is no need for you to watch the bird-cage!"

"No, sir, certainly."

"I will trouble you to keep your eyes on me."

"Yes, sir, certainly."

Nevertheless, furtively, whenever she thought she would not be observed, the girl's eyes did revert to the bird-cage.

"Tweet! tweet!" sang the canary.

Mr Grice paused, shut his mouth and frowned.

"Tweet! tweet!"

The bird was waking up again. It surely was not singing in its sleep!

Grice looked hard at it, and saw that the ill-adjusted cover was sliding off. As he watched, down it came, and fell in a heap on the carpet. At once the canary resumed its song in full flow and acute shrillness.

"This is intolerable!" said Grice. "Andrew, remove the cage."

His son stood up, got a chair, and, whilst Jemima looked on in breathless interest, unhooked the bird-cage, and then stepped down.

"Take care, sir," said the girl. "You're spilling the bird's drinking water."

When the canary had been taken into the company parlour, and the doors shut, and Andrew had resumed his seat, "Hammer" returned to his topic, and continued as though his discourse had suffered no interruption. But his own attention was speedily distracted. Ada was obviously signalling some in-

structions to the maid. She was at the fire, behind Grice's back, and he could not see her without turning round, but he observed that Jemima looked inquiringly towards her, then down on the carpet, then back at her mistress, then gave a nod and look of comprehension, and stooped from her chair to pick up something from off the ground.

Again the speaker halted in his discourse, and in a tone of irritation asked,—

"What is it now?"

"Please, sir, only a bit of groundsel dropped by Mr Andrew as he was carrying out the cage."

"Put it on the table and be still!"

"Yes, sir."

He resumed. But he had not proceeded far before he heard Ada at the fire-irons. She was poking the fire.

He paused and coughed.

Then she began to rake out the white ash in the corners of the grate.

Jabez looked over his shoulder.

"How long is this noise going to last?"

"Till the fire is in good condition."

He turned to the subject of discourse.

Then he heard the shovel grating against the bricks of the hearth. A red-hot cinder had been raked out, also a lump of coal blistering and spurting forth flame. Ada was picking these pieces up

on the shovel to lay them on the fire again. Grice coughed again and moved impatiently in his chair. He raised his voice and spoke loudly and rapidly so as to drown the noise of the shovel. Then Ada took the hearthbrush and swept together the ashes under the grate. This fidgeted "Hammer" still further. He lost the thread of his ideas; he became confused in what he said. Then he turned about in his seat and said imperiously,—

"Have done! This is insufferable."

"I'm not going to have a dirty hearth," said the bride.

"Have you finished now?"

"Yes."

No sooner, however, had he recommenced than, in putting back the brush, Ada touched the fire-irons that she had stood up at the side of the grate, and they came down with a crash.

Grice shut his book with violence.

"Never, never, have I endured such contradiction; never such interruption before!"

"Jemima," said Ada, ignoring his wrath, "bring in supper, and don't forget my stout."

"Stout!" echoed Grice. "Stout, did you say? Do you not know that I never allow alcoholic drinks on my table—in my house?"

"This is neither your house, nor your table. Bring the stout, Jemima, and a corkscrew in case it is not up."

"I will not sit at the same table with you if you touch it," said "Hammer."

"Jemima," ordered Ada, with undisturbed coolness, "put a napkin on the corner table before the shell-flowers, and lay Mr Grice's plate and knife and fork there."

The maid did as required. "Hammer" was unable to speak for astonishment and wrath at the effrontery of his daughter-in-law. He had said he would not sit with her, and he could not retract, or go from his own words that evening. He was constrained to submit to be put in the corner at a little rosewood table, the surface of which was very polished, and was, moreover, encumbered with a stand, on which stood a vase that contained artificial flowers, made of sea-shells, under a bell.

Jemima took a glass paper-weight, in which, beneath the convex surface, might be seen a view of Peel Castle, and an inscription—"A present from the Isle of Man"—and placed it on one corner of the napkin.

"I think, sir, that will hold it," said Jemima confidentially; "but you won't fidget, will you, sir? The table is awful slippery."

Sullen, silent, uneasy at the novelty of his position, hardly knowing what steps to take to establish his menaced supremacy, Grice seated himself at the corner table, with his back to the lamp and

the supper table in the middle of the room, and to his son and daughter-in-law. In his vexation his hand shook, and he knocked over a spoon that fell on the floor.

"Now, then, that is of silver," said Ada. "Don't you know that every time a bit of plate goes down, a penny is struck out of it? How clumsy some people are! What will you eat?"

"Hammer" Grice, conscious that his position was undignified, even ludicrous, that Jemima was laughing at him—worse than that, pitied him—looked surlily over his left shoulder and saw that in front of Andrew was cold mutton. He turned his head, and, looking over his right shoulder, saw hot beefsteak pie before Ada.

He wanted hot beefsteak pie. He disliked cold mutton, but he was too offended with Ada to ask for some of her dish, to subject himself to the annoyance of being given too little crust and too much fat and gristle. She was capable of doing this out of sheer wantonness. In a tone of irritation he said,—

"Andrew—mutton!"

Then the maid-servant came to him, stooped, and, offering a dish of boiled potatoes, said, in a tone such as she might have used to a peevish, naughty child,—

"There, sir! You'll have some potato; won't you, now?"

He resented the tone, tossed his great head, and said roughly,—

"I'll eat bread."

"You'll be careful—do now—about that napkin. The table is terrible slippery."

Grice had got his mouth full of mutton, when he heard Ada say,—

"Andrew, be so good as to cut the strings to my cork; don't be afraid, the stout isn't very much up."

"Do nothing of the kind!" ordered "Hammer," as soon as he had bolted the mutton.

He could calculate on obedience from his son; but he was too late—Andrew had done what his wife required.

"It *is* up, Andrew," said Ada. "Pour the stout out carefully—not like that. Who but a fool would hold the bottle in that fashion? So—sideways. Gent-ly, gent-ly; I don't like froth! Will you have some? There is plenty for both." A long breath. "It is de-licious."

"Andrew! I forbid you."

"Father, I am drinking skimmed milk."

"Hammer" continued to eat till he had cleared his plate. Then he sat scowling at the shell-flowers, with his hands on his knees under the rosewood table. Occasionally, as a spasm of anger came over him, he kicked out at the leg of the table. Then

came in the sweets. He would not look round, and he accepted with a churlish growl what was placed before him. As the lamp was immediately behind him, the shadow of his broad person was cast over his plate with its contents, and he ate in obscurity and discomfort. He was too angry to pay heed to, certainly to enjoy, his food, and the shadow was too deep to allow him to observe it well. He heard his daughter-in-law, whose spirits had risen under the influence of the bottled stout, talk cheerfully, if not flippantly, to Andrew, but he gave no heed to what she said. He chafed at his humiliating position in shadow in the corner. Presently Ada interrupted what she was saying to ask,—

"Any more, Grumps?"

"No."

Then he could have bit his tongue out for having answered her, when she spoke to him so insolently.

"Do you like it, Mr Grice?"

"Middling."

"I thought you would. Have another spoonful. It is TIPSY CAKE."

"What!" roared "Hammer," bounding to his feet, and, in so doing, he pulled down napkin, plate, spoon and tumbler, also the present from the Isle of Man. "What!" thundered he. "I'll tell you what — once for all. Understand! Where I am, there

one of us — you or I—goes to the wall — you or I!"

"Quite so! And I am sure that will not be *I*." Then, rising from her place with a mocking laugh, Ada asked,—"This evening, which of us has best *improved the occasion?*"

CHAPTER XV.

A BASKET OF BLACKBERRIES.

JABEZ GRICE'S mood during the ensuing day was not cheerful. He was angry with himself for having borne the humiliation to which he had been subjected; angry with Ada for having humbled him; angry with Jemima for having assisted in his humiliation; and angry with Andrew for having witnessed his deposition from the first place of authority. He showed his ill-humour at the works; nothing pleased him. The men engaged were idle, clumsy, stupid. The bricks were bad, the wood rotten, the lime poor.

Mr Button came to the place and buttonholed him.

"Well, Grice, how do you get on with Ada?" he asked, with his cunning eyes screwed up.

"Hammer" growled an unintelligible answer.

"Oh, I see," said Button, "begun to break your back, has she? How long before it is broke, eh?" And he went away cackling with laughter.

Resentment rendered Grice's heart bitter, and he resolved to make a determined stand against Ada. He had quelled all Saltwich into deference—that is to say, that part of Saltwich which was worth consideration—and was he to be defied by one girl? He would speedily show her which was master—what he, "Hammer" Grice, was.

On the previous evening Jabez had not smoked. He was fond of his pipe; he could ill get on without it, accustomed to it every evening. For once, the night before, he had not pulled it out and puffed. Tom Button was no smoker; there was no savour of tobacco about the house. Rather than engage in a fresh contest, he had foregone his pipe. From something let drop by Ada, Grice felt sure that she would make a stand against his smoking in the sitting-room. He would draw forth his pipe that evening; it should be no calumet of peace, but a bone of contention. Over that pipe the battle should be waged, the issue of which would determine who was to be the governing power in that place. He ruminated over the future. Should he achieve one splendid victory, and then retire and go back to Alma Terrace? But that would be a confession of defeat. More than that, the house, No. 4, could not receive him. Tom Button occupied his room. When Queenie had been received, an additional bedchamber had been taken at No. 5, and into this Andrew had been removed that she

might have his vacated room. Now that was given up, and the third apartment at No. 4 was occupied by a servant, engaged because Tom Button was exacting as to his comforts.

Moreover, whilst the works were in progress, it was advisable that Grice should be on the spot to superintend; when the factory began work, as the boiling was to be continued night and day, it was essential that he should be at hand throughout the twenty-four hours.

No, it was not practicable for him to retire now. All the more important that a brilliant and decisive victory should establish for ever the fact that his will must be supreme, his word the law governing the new establishment.

Having determined on the field of operations and the plan of campaign, Jabez Grice felt more easy in his mind, and his former confidence returned. He would waive the objection to sitting at table with Ada whilst she imbibed stout—at all events for that evening. He would not again insist on a domestic harangue till he had achieved his great success in the battle over the pipe.

When Grice had come to this resolve, his equanimity of temper returned. His anger entertained against Ada was not abated, but the great disturbance of mind due to a sense of reverse became allayed. He contemplated the prospect of paying Ada off

with interest for her audacity in attempting to resist him, in having put on him affronts.

In his excitement and indignation, Jabez had not thought of Queenie. It was other with Andrew. Having obtained leave of absence from his father, he made his way to Saltwich and inquired into the proceedings of Seth White. He speedily learned that the fellow had lodged with Mrs Rainbow, and also that he had disappeared three weeks ago, somewhere about the time when Queenie had left the Button's.

Then Andrew went to Heathendom to question Mrs Rainbow herself. He found that lady loquacious, but uncommunicative on the point he desired to have cleared up. It was true that Seth had been with her, and that he was gone. He had departed on the trail of a circus visiting Yorkshire, in the hopes of getting an engagement therein. When, however, Andrew mentioned Queenie, he could not gather from the woman whether she had seen her, and whether she knew what had become of her.

Hesitatingly, guarding against allowing her to suppose that he gave credence to the surmise, he mentioned what had been said in his presence—that Queenie had gone off with Seth.

Mrs Rainbow laughed.

"I'll soon set your mind at rest on that," said she. "I've a letter from Seth somewhere—I got it

three days ago. Lor' bless me, wherever can it be!"

After long searching it was discovered in a cup on the mantelshelf. She handed it to Andrew.

"I can't read myself," she said, "but that will show you Queenie ain't with him. More I won't say."

The letter began with an account of how Seth had followed a circus from place to place till he had finally overtaken it at Hull, and how that he had met with disappointment there. The season was at an end. Not till next spring would companies be on the move, therefore he must make shift to keep life in him during the winter months by following some other trade. The letter concluded with, "My respects to the little Queen, and please to tell her there is nothing to be done through winter."

"Why!" exclaimed Andrew. "You know where she is."

"How do you make that out?" asked Mrs Rainbow.

"By the letter. He sends a message to her by you."

"It don't follow I knows," replied the woman. "He may think she is still at the Button's."

"How can he? According to your own account he left Saltwich four days after the disappearance of

Queenie. He must have known of that. He had been her playfellow from childhood. Come, tell me! Where is she?"

"I know nothing. Don't ask me. Now I'm off with my wheelbarrow selling herrings, and I can't attend to you."

Seeing that the woman was resolved to say no more, yet convinced that she could communicate further information if she chose, Andrew turned disappointedly to the door, when it opened and in came Queenie with a white rush basket in her hand, looking brighter, more fresh in colour, than he had ever seen her before.

She started, and so did he; and both stood for a moment contemplating each other with some embarrassment. He recovered first, and advancing to her took her hand.

"Queenie—only yesterday did father and I learn that you were not at the Button's; that you had run away."

"Run away, Andrew! That is an odd way of putting it. I was—but no, I will say nothing about it. I have heard the news. You are married!"

"Yes, Queenie!"—involuntarily and unconsciously he sighed. "Yesterday the knot for life was tied."

"Poor Andrew!"—involuntarily, unconsciously she said it.

Then both were silent.

Queenie looked down at the basket, and that enabled her to escape from the embarrassing situation.

"See here, Andrew, I heard of it and I thought I must give you and *her* some little present. I have no money, so I give you what I can. I have been all the morning in the forest picking blackberries—they are as big as mulberries. I have put in only the finest. Did you ever see blackberries of such a size as this, Andrew? and they are sweet as honey and melt in the mouth. And I wove the little basket myself. I have learned how to do it from that poor crippled child—" Queenie checked herself and, colouring, said,—"I do not want you to know where I am. I am very happy. I am with the kindest people. But I do not wish you to come and see me. I do not wish your father to know where I am, or he may use his authority to order me away, and place me where I could not endure the life. Put a beefsteak before a horse and he will turn away his head. Give a man a handful of grass and he will toss it aside. You must give the beefsteak to the man and the grass to the horse. Your father tries to feed me on what does not suit my nature. Now I am where — being a mere animal—I can eat grass, and gather blackberries, so I can trip and sing and laugh and be happy. I brought this little basket here

to-day for Mrs Rainbow to take to you as a present from a friend and to name no names; but, oh Andrew, you have caught me, and now you will know whose fingers picked the fruit. Well, I fed you with nuts the first time I saw you—take these now."

The blackberries were superb; she had chosen only the largest and ripest she could find, and had arranged them tastefully along with many tinted leaves touched by the transforming wand of autumn, all enclosed in the pretty white basket.

Andrew thanked her with gratitude, but yet with consciousness of some restraint. It was so strange, so unsatisfactory that this child, for whom his father had made himself responsible, should be thus adrift, lodged temporarily he knew not where, among persons he knew nothing of, possibly exposed to danger and certainly without means.

As soon as he had taken the basket, Queenie slipped away, saying,—

"Do not follow me, please Andrew; it is best for both of us that we should see as little as possible of each other."

Then she was gone.

Andrew returned thoughtfully to Button's, carrying the blackberries.

He found his father talking to Ada in the drive outside the house. It was necessary or advisable to

include a portion of the garden in the precincts of the works. This Jabez was explaining to his daughter-in-law, who received the information with a bad grace.

"I know what the end will be," said she. "We shall be able to have neither vegetables, nor shrubs, nor flowers. Everything will be poisoned. Very well, take in a bit more of ground you are going to blight. It matters not!" Then, turning to Andrew—"What have you got there?"

"Blackberries—a wedding present from Queenie. Father, I have seen her."

"Queenie! Queenie again!" exclaimed Ada.

"You have seen her?" asked Jabez. "Is she not gone with that circus rider?"

"No, father. Nothing of the sort."

"Where is she?"

"I do not know."

"That is false," said Ada intervening. "You gave me the lie yesterday; I return it now. Of course you have found her, for you hid her."

"Do not be unreasonable, Ada," said Andrew, in a soothing tone. "She ran away because she could not fit herself into the surroundings here any more than she could at Alma Terrace. Till yesterday, I did not know she was gone. Now I do not know where she is in hiding. She would not tell me. It is by the merest chance that I lighted on her. She had heard

of our marriage, and had been in the forest collecting blackberries for us as a humble offering, and she brought them to Mrs Rainbow when I happened to be there inquiring about Seth White."

"Seth White!" sneered Ada. "What care you about Seth White! You went after that circus girl."

"I went to ask what had become of White, as I gathered from you that you supposed he had taken her away. It turns out that you were wrong. He is in Hull; she is somewhere in the neighbourhood."

"Why need you inquire after her?"

"Because my father is responsible for her. She is his ward. He has, I believe, money that he holds in trust for her. We are bound to ascertain where she is and how she fares."

"You leave all that to me," said Jabez. "I did not ask you to meddle. As to her money, she must satisfy me that she will make a good use of it before I trust her with any."

"But, father, she is without a penny. She picked these blackberries because she could buy us nothing."

"If she were leading a reputable and honest life, she would not be in hiding. That which is of the truth cometh to the light. That which is of evil flieth the light and conceals itself. Where is she? Let her come to me, tell me whom she is with, what

she is doing, confess that she has been a prodigal and is a penitent, and I will let her have money—not till then!"

"I am certain you misjudge her, father!"

"I never misjudge. I take you to witness. Did not I declare destruction would come to that circus, even before it fell? When I shook out my green umbrella against it—did I not therewith shake it level with the dust? It went to destruction. Even so I know—I possess moral certainty that this unhappy girl is going fast to destruction, if she be not lost already."

"But—what grounds have you, father, for this judgment?"

"Grounds! grounds! Are you catechising me as you catechised your wife yesterday? I want no grounds. I have a moral conviction it is so, which stands above all grounds. There are certain matters one knows by an inner light. By that light I know that she is lost—a child of perdition."

"Give me that," said Ada, pointing to the basket.

Andrew handed her the pretty little vessel, with its dainty arrangement of many-coloured leaves and fruit, every one of which seemed to have been placed in order with a study of effect.

Ada no sooner had the basket in her hand than she flung the blackberries and fluttering leaves away among the bushes, over the gravel and the grass, and

then, casting down the basket itself, she trod it out of shape, saying,—

"I would it were her head!" There were blackberries still in it, some under her foot, and the ripe juice oozed out. "I would," said Ada, "that were her blood! I hate her!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A BROKEN BACK.

With a sanguine heart and sure confidence Jabez Grice looked forward to the conflict that was to take place in the evening over his pipe. If he chose to pull it out, to stuff it with tobacco, to light and puff at it, Ada might give him black looks, cast at him sharp words, but she could not prevent him from smoking, any more than he could prevent her from drinking stout. He saw his mistake on the previous evening. He had protested against that which he could not, without violence, withhold her from doing. Also, in the matter of the harangue—improving the occasion—he had laid himself open to annoyance. But it was another matter altogether with a pipe. She would be powerless to interfere effectively. He chose his own ground as did the English at Crecy and at Waterloo, and the secret of success lies very generally in that. After supper, Jabez drew out his

account books, opened them on the table, and then, with his eye fixed on Ada, he extracted his pipe from its case and stuffed it with bird's-eye.

"I am not accustomed to tobacco," said she at once. "I object to your smoking in the house."

Jabez made no answer. The pipe was between his lips, he stooped to the fire, kindled a piece of paper, applied the flame to the bowl, and drew the first whiff, with his eye fastened on Ada.

For a moment she seemed disconcerted, then sat down, accepted the inevitable and said no more.

The tobacco glowed in the bowl of Grice's pipe, but hotter glowed the sense of triumph in his heart. From his nostrils he exhaled two columns of smoke, and about his brain rolled the fume of the incense of self-laudation at having thus decisively shown that he would not submit to dictation from his son's wife.

"If you dislike smoke," said Andrew in a half whisper, "why do you not go into the drawing-room?"

"In a house like this," answered Ada, "every smell, every sound is in all the rooms at once."

"I will take in a candle and accompany you," said Andrew.

"I will go there when I choose, and by myself."

Jabez Grice remained by the fireside for some minutes, doing nothing save enjoy the sense of

triumph, but he was not a man to remain inert, and he presently turned his chair round, took up his pencil, and began his accounts.

At once Ada also rose and lighting a candle, left the room, and in so doing forgot to shut the door. The chamber was, perhaps, somewhat close, and Grice had no objection to the admission of fresh air.

After a while, however, he looked up, with an expression of annoyance on his face, and said,—

"Andrew—the door."

Ada had retired to the drawing-room, that formal apartment which, in middle-class houses, is never inhabited, only visited on solemn occasions of state. It contained a pianoforte, rarely used and sadly out of tune, for Ada, though at school she had been taught to play, was not musical, and rarely touched the keys.

Now, in a spirit of perversity, she seated herself at the instrument, lighted the candles on it, opened her school exercises and began to strum.

Not only was the piano out of tune, but an F was mute. The wire was broken. Had she chosen a composition in which the F sharp was required and not the natural, this would have been of little moment; but as if out of wilfulness, she played all her pieces in that series of keys in which the F natural is an indispensable note, so that everything she played proclaimed the defective condition of the

instrument. Moreover, Ada played badly—out of time, without feeling.

Jabez Grice had begun a calculation of the outlay in wages on the works. To calculate he required to be undisturbed. This detestable and defective strumming irritated his ear, teased his mind, distracted his attention.

"Andrew," said he, "go and shut the drawing-room door. That woman has left it open as well as this."

The young man left the room. He entered that in which was his wife, and waited at the side of the piano till she had finished one of her pieces, that he might remonstrate.

But she did not stay to finish. She interrupted her performance in the middle of a run, and asked,—

"Well?"

"Dear Ada, my father is adding up his accounts now, and this disturbs him somewhat."

"He should not smoke."

"Can you not play when he is not in the house?"

"And he—can he not smoke when he is out of it?"

"Ada, you should consider him, it is his habit, and at his age a man can ill break himself of an inveterate habit."

She struck the keys, made them jangle.

"Andrew," said she, "his back must be broken."

"Good Heavens, Ada, what do you mean?"

"If I do not break his, he will break mine. We shall see. Give me twenty-four hours more. I'll do it."

Again she struck the keys and produced a crash of discords.

Andrew, incapable of effecting anything in the way of compromise, returned to the parlour, where his father was, after carefully shutting each door behind him.

"It is this wretched house. These square houses are odious. As she said—the sound is everywhere. I am glad to think the smoke is also everywhere!" said Grice, grimly, and he shut his account books. "I will do these sums when all are in bed. Then, I shall have quiet."

The battle was a drawn one. "Hammer" Grice had not achieved a decisive victory. He thought to himself—"If she tries this on again, I will cut the wires."

Next day, Jabez was much occupied on the works. The chimney was rapidly progressing, and the first pan was being set up in the wych-house. In a fortnight, he calculated that the factory might start work—sufficiently to show Brundrith that they were in earnest.

Mr Nottershaw went over everything and expressed his satisfaction.

"We shall do a stroke of work here," said he, and rubbed his hands together.

Mr Button arrived.

"Well, Jabez," he asked, with twinkling eyes, "how is your poor back?"

"I don't understand you."

"Ada."

"Oh! humph! to be frank with you, she is not the daughter-in-law I had expected; far too self-willed, and lacks respect for her elders and betters. In a little time I'll bring her to know her place."

"You think so?"

"Sure of it."

That evening, at supper, Ada was unusually cheerful—she was even amiable—and Andrew's heart, which had felt an oppression since he made her his own, was momentarily relieved.

Ada could be vastly agreeable when she pleased. She was clever, and had some humour, though the latter was of a caustic nature. On this occasion she was apparently endeavouring to make amends for the unpleasantnesses of the past evenings. Grice looked at her with watchful and studious eyes. He was puzzled. Did she suppose by this means to gain her point and win of his good-nature that he should abandon his pipe? He would know only when the table was cleared and he pulled forth his tobacco pouch.

Accordingly, he waited with some impatience till the supper was removed, and the window had been thrown open for a moment to ventilate the room. Then, watching Ada, he drew out his meerschaum, and felt for the tobacco. She uttered no protest, did not even raise her eyes from the fire, to which she had turned. The pouch was empty.

"There's some baccy upstairs," said Grice, and left the apartment.

He went leisurely up the stairs to his room, which was immediately over that in which meals were taken, and the little family party sat.

In another moment Andrew heard his father descend the stairs more rapidly than he went up; the door was thrown open, and in it stood "Hammer" Grice, looking angry and saying,—

"Ada, the maid has not made my bed. The room has not been touched since I left it this morning."

"Well; make your own bed."

"I am not accustomed to do these things. Send Jemima."

"I have told Jemima to go to bed."

"There is my ewer with no water in it."

"Fill it yourself."

"I tell you, I am not accustomed to do these things."

"Nor am I accustomed to tobacco."

Grice stood in the doorway, silent, glowering at

Ada. She looked him straight in the eyes, without rising from her chair, without wincing.

"I cannot sleep in a bed that has not been made."

"Then make it yourself."

"I cannot wash unless my ewer be filled."

"Then fill it yourself."

Grice remained uncertain, livid with anger, ashamed to confess his mortification. Presently he slammed the door behind him and went upstairs.

Andrew was too astonished to speak, too dismayed to protest. Ada put one knee up, and rocked it, singing or humming an air from "Traviata." A stumping and banging about of furniture overhead was audible. Then Ada laughed, and dropping her knee said,—

"Old Grumps is making his bed!"

"Oh, Ada, how can you serve my father so!"

"If he will not consult my comfort, I will not consult his. If he makes himself disagreeable to me, I can and will make myself disagreeable in return. Andrew, let this be a lesson to you; it is best that the controversy should be between your father and me, and not between you and me. If, in spite of warning, you oppose me in the way he has done—in any way, in anything—then consider how intolerable I can make life to you. Hearken! there is your father lumbering downstairs with his jug to get water."

It was as Ada said. No sooner had Jabez Grice made his bed to the best of his ability and knowledge,

than he took his ewer and descended. He liked to have plenty of fresh water in his room. He loved to souse his head every morning.

When he entered the kitchen carrying his jug, he was surprised to find Jemima there, eating her supper.

From what Ada had said, he had not expected this, and he had thrown off his coat and waistcoat whilst making his bed.

"How is this?" asked Grice. "I have been given no water in my room, and my bed has been neglected."

"Please, sir," said Jemima, rising, "missus said I was to leave it all in a muddle."

"Never mind what she says; I will have my necessities attended to. Where is the pump?"

"In the back-kitchen, sir. If you will hold the jug sir, I will work the handle. I am very sorry, sir, very sorry, but missus gave me such particular orders—"

"Never mind the orders. Pump!"

"Shall I bring the lamp, sir?"

"No need—I suppose one can get water in the dark."

A few strokes and the ewer overflowed.

"Now, then," said Grice, "I insist on your taking the jug upstairs. If I had not myself made the bed, I would drive you to do it. But I will not do everything. I will not be turned into a maid-of-all-work by my daughter-in-law. I will not be beaten

at every point in my contest with her. Take the ewer immediately."

"Please, sir, I daren't!"

"I say you shall. Carry it to my room."

He pressed the jug on her.

"Oh! what will missus do?"

Then they heard a sharp rap on the kitchen table. Ada was there with the carriage-whip in her hand, and she had struck the board with the plated handle.

"Come out from that dark hole, you two," she said. "Grumps, what frolics are you about with my maid?"

Grice and Jemima emerged from the back kitchen. The girl frightened, "Hammer" confused and angry.

"What are you doing there? In the scullery, in the dark?" asked Ada, and she rapped the table again.

"I came after water," explained Grice.

"In this indecent condition, showing your braces! You came on the excuse of water! You came in reality after the girl. Because Jemima has been taken from the workhouse and has no parents, no friends, you think her fair game. Come, carry your water, and be off—sharp, I say; be off, you scandalous old Turk!"

Grice looked at this insulting, outrageous woman with his jaw quivering, his face bloodless, his eyes glaring with hate.

Ada had reversed the whip in her hand, and she now switched the lash about between him and herself. Then she laughed.

He remained immovable, clutching the water jug, but now he had set his teeth, and his huge jaw was fixed. His eyes glowed like steel at white heat.

"I know the very thoughts of your heart," said Ada, looking dauntlessly into his eyes. "You are meditating to knock me down on the kitchen floor. Do so. Nothing would please me more. Then you will have done for yourself utterly, irretrievably, not in this house only, but in Saltwich, in the whole Serious World."

She cracked the whip.

"Go along with your water jug."

And he went without a word.

Next day Button was at the works.

"Well, Grice—how is your back—broken, man?"

Jabez scowled, but made no answer.

"Ha! I thought so. Broken—broken. I knew Ada could do it—ay—and would do it!"

CHAPTER XVII.

DOMESTIC THORNS.

It did not take a fortnight for Andrew to discover that, as far as his happiness was concerned, he had made a mistake in following his head instead of his heart. In that fortnight a root of bitterness had thrown its fibres through his soul—bitterness against his father, who had urged him to a union which would blight his life.

In all matters external, the match had promised well, and was likely to keep its promise. Ada Button was the daughter of a yeoman of reputed means, whereas Andrew was a mere workman in a factory; the son, indeed, of an overlooker, but not of a partner in the business. He had done well for himself, therefore, in the opinion of most people in Saltwich.

Others, however, had shaken their heads. The bride might be his superior in position and in fortune, she might be handsome, and with good manners, but

—it was remembered that others had fought shy of this cold beauty, who, in spite of her icy exterior and haughty demeanour, was reported to have the temper of a dragon.

When the pair had stood before the altar at Scatterley, in the parish church, and Andrew had taken the thin white hand in his, and the Reverend Edward Meek had demanded of him his solemn oath to love, honour and cherish the woman at his side, then Andrew had responded not with his lips only, but with the fervour of his heart, and had sworn to hold to her and to her only as long as life lasted; to her only till death parted them. He had said to himself,—"Now I have my wife. She may be frosty as a March day, but I will be the sun to shine on her cold boughs and make them bloom with the May flowers of love. Hard she is not really, only reserved. It is better for a man to have a woman as his wife who treasures up her feelings and pours them forth into her husband's bosom, than one who is gushing to all alike. The sourest apples give the sweetest cider. She is mine, for better, for worse—I will be true to her in thought, as well as word and deed."

As he thus mused, he pressed her hand. She did not divine what passed in his mind.

Thus it had been at the wedding. That same evening a cloud had troubled the sky. She had insulted his father. On the morrow, matters had not

much mended. On the third day the breach with the old man was complete. Andrew loved his father and respected him. The indignities offered to the elder offended the young man. His remonstrances with his wife were unheeded. He had himself come in for some sharp words, and for galling disregard of his prejudices.

It seemed to Andrew as though his wife cast aside all semblance of amiability when the necessity for disguise was over, as if she thought that having obtained a husband, she might treat him and his father with disrespect, lack of consideration, even with open outrage. It was as though hitherto she had worn her cold exterior, and assumed a placid, even engaging manner as a mask, and that she now regarded the time for masquerading as over, or, at all events, that the mask was out of place in her own household, before her own family.

What Andrew began to fear in the first few days of marriage, within the fortnight became with him a certainty. He would not find love—though he might find jealousy—at home, and the domestic hearth was to be a scene of perpetual strife, or of submission to his wife's caprice, resignation to the outpour of her bitter temper.

But this disappointment was not the only fly in Andrew's cup. His confidence in the judgment of his father had received a rude shock. He had

married Ada in compliance with the wishes, if not at the command, of Jabez. His father had represented Ada as precisely the daughter-in-law that would suit him—punctilious in the performance of her duties, and austere in her demeanour. Not even Queenie could have proved so disturbing to the happiness of the elder man, so wounding to his self-respect, as had this elect woman. Queenie might have irritated Grice by her thoughtlessness, but would never have deliberately jeered in his face. Queenie, if by chance she had offended, would have pleaded in the prettiest, meekest way for forgiveness; Ada exulted in having beaten down and trampled on the wishes, and in having humbled the dignity, of her father-in-law. Jabez Grice claimed to judge men and women by intuition, an illumination of the mind which dispensed with evidence. By this inner light he had approved of Ada; and, as the event showed, had erred. Was there any reason for holding that his judgment in condemning Queenie was sounder? But there was worse behind. Andrew had begun to doubt his father's rectitude.

Jabez Grice was trustee for poor little Queenie. He had received her money—some three thousand pounds—that had been invested by her father. This money Jabez had realised, and was now sinking it in the new speculation he favoured. As far as Andrew could see, there was no prospect of any loss

falling on Queenie, ultimately. The money was secured by mortgage on the land and on the buildings it served to erect. So far, Jabez Grice was not acting against her interests and differently from the wishes of her father, even though out of this capital he schemed to make a great fortune for himself. But why did not his father concern himself about the child? Why did he allow her to run about the country, and take no trouble to discover where she was, what sort of people she was with, and whether she were in comfort. How much of the interest of the money Santi had left was given to his child? Not a penny. As far as Andrew knew, two shillings was every bit of coin that Grice had allowed her. He had, indeed, furnished her wardrobe, had housed and fed her for a brief space of time. But three thousand pounds at four per cent. meant a hundred and twenty pounds per annum. It seemed to Andrew hardly just to the orphan to be employing her capital to the advantage of the trustee, and giving her no interest; making absolutely no provision for her.

This thought had so lodged in his mind and worked there that it became dominant; it preyed upon him and drew off his thoughts from his own unhappiness. In one unfortunate effort to be frank with Ada, and gain her confidence, he spoke about this in private. She flared up at once.

"Queenie again! Yes; I know very well to what this introduction leads. You want her to be brought back into this house. Never! Do you hear this, Andrew—never!"

"My dear wife, do be reasonable."

"Reasonable! You charge me with lack of sense now! I was a liar, and now am an idiot. Thank you! I have my reason. I know what marriage vows mean. I am not going to open my doors to all the rag-tag and bob-tail, to women of doubtful character and no reputation, so as to gratify you. In that one particular your father has shown discretion. He has not asked me to take her under my roof again."

"I have proposed nothing of the sort."

"No—not proposed it. You were sounding before you did so. It is in your mind. It was in your purpose."

After this brief and painful scene, Andrew went forth into the night. The air in the house stifled him, the walls of the square rooms closed in on him. He must breathe fresh air and feel that he was in open space.

The heavenly vault was besprent with stars Andrew walked with lowered head along the drive Something light was under the bushes—was it a cat? He stood still and looked. It did not move. He stooped and picked it up. The starlight had brought

into prominence the crushed, little white basket made by Queenie's fingers, in which she had sent her modest wedding present.

It was trodden out of shape; it was wet with dew, no doubt soiled with clay. Andrew took it in his hand, went to the gate, leaned his elbows on the rail upon which he and Queenie had sat. He swung the battered basket with his fingers against the rail, drew a long breath, and sighed—"So — so— married!"

He remembered that kiss given to Queenie as he held her sitting on the rail; a kiss that had assured her that he loved her, and which had convinced him, by the answering pressure, that his love was returned. What had he done after that mutual confession? Rushed into an engagement with another. He thought of his parting with Queenie that moonlit night after Ada had just shown him a glimpse of her real nature. He knew that he had then, by his manner, in spite of his efforts to conceal it, shown Queenie that she still had possession of his heart.

Then a new train of thoughts arose. That same was the night on which the orphan girl had left Button's—had gone away of her own accord, so Ada had represented it.

Ada said that Queenie had been meeting and talking with a man outside the house, and con-

cluded that it was with this man that she had probably eloped.

"Why!" exclaimed Andrew, "it was with me she was speaking that night. She had come out here to have a word with me."

He was now aware of the jealousy with which Ada regarded the girl, the hatred she bore her, and which was manifested when she trod under foot the harmless little basket with its well-meant present. Was it not possible, was it not probable that Ada had followed him when he left the house that night, and had overheard his conversation with the girl, and then, moved by jealousy, had driven her away?

Driven her away—at night. Driven out the orphan child who had neither home nor friends. There boiled up in his heart a flood of rage and indignation. The thought that Ada, out of jealousy, had exposed that innocent, helpless child to the worst peril, was like the borer driven through the crust that overlies the reservoir of brine; there was an uprush in the heart of Andrew; it seethed in his veins, it hissed and foamed in his brain. Regardless of everything, he walked back to the house, went upstairs, and shutting the bedroom door behind him, said, in a tone such as he had never used to any human being before,—

"Ada!"

"Well! what now?"

She looked at him sneeringly, but was momentarily quelled by the fire in his eye, the drawn lines in his face, the resolution set on his brow.

"What now?—this. I will learn the truth about Queenie, how it was she left this house."

"I have told you, she met a man among the bushes."

"She spoke with me. She had something to say to me."

"Oh! you—was it?"

Ada laughed.

"I insist on the truth. My belief is that you urned her out of the house."

His young wife was silent.

"I am resolved to know the truth. If you will not speak, I shall summon the maid. She will be communicative. She must know some of the particulars."

Ada hesitated. She looked again at her husband —he was transformed. This was no longer the timid, yielding Andrew—the Andrew on whom she could put her foot, and he writhed like a worm. He was strong, ruthless in his wrath.

"As you will — I turned her out," said Ada, sullenly.

"And it was I who spoke with her. We were as cousins—had been companions. She naturally desired a word with me. If you wish to know about what — it was to ascertain from my lips

whether it was true that you and I—you and I"—there was bitterness as of death in those words—"you and I were to be married."

Now it was Ada's turn. With an air of triumph she said, and her voice shook with rage as she spoke,—

"After her parting with you, there was the other lover hiding in the bushes."

"What other lover?"

"The fellow with whom she went away when I shut the door against her, and refused to have such a jade pollute the threshold with her foot."

"I tell you that fellow, Seth White, did not go away with her. He is in Hull; she is somewhere not very many miles distant."

"I care not—it was a man. Any man would suit her, doubtless."

"What sort of man was he?"

"I don't know; he wore gaiters and a baggy shooting-coat."

"Why! it was Rab."

"Rab or Seth—it is all one to me. You are not the only person that the jade has had dancing about her. Know that, and may you relish the knowledge."

END OF VOL. II.

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